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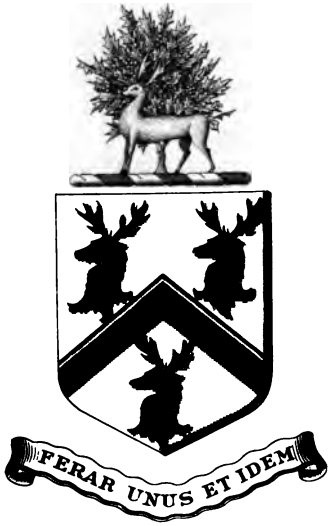
THE MASTER OF GREYLANDS

MRS. HENRY WOOD

Vol 24



Arthur Burdett Collingwood.

THE MASTER OF GREYLANDS

THE MASTER OF GREYLANDS

A NOVEL

BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD

AUTHOR OF

"EAST LYNNE," "THE CHANNINGS," "JOHNNY LUDLOW," ETC.

SIXTY-SECOND THOUSAND

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THE MASTER OF GREYLANDS.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE BANK PARLOUR.

STILBOROUGH: an old-fashioned market-town of some importance, but not the chief town of the county. It was Thursday, and market-day. The streets wore an air of bustle, farmers and other country people passing and repassing from the corn-market to their respective inns, or perhaps from their weekly visit to the banker's.

In the heart of the town, where the street was wide and the buildings were imposing, stood the bank. It was close to the town-hall on the one hand, and the old church of St. Mark's on the other, and was opposite the new market-house, where the farmers' wives and daughters sat with their butter and poultry. For in those days—many a year ago now—people had not risen above their sphere; and the farmers' wives would have thought they were going to ruin outright had any one but themselves kept market. A large and handsome house, this bank, the residence of its owner, Mr. Peter Castlemaine.

No name stood higher in the neighbourhood than Mr. Peter Castlemaine's. Though of fairly good descent, he was what might be called a self-made man. Beginning in a quiet way in early life, he had risen by degrees to what he now was—to what he had long been—the chief banker in the county. People left the county-town to bank with him; in all his undertakings he was supposed to be flourishing; in funds a millionaire.

The afternoon drew to a close; the business of the day was over; the clerks were putting the last touches to their accounts

previously to departing, and Mr. Peter Castlemaine sat alone in his private room. It was a large apartment, comfortably, even luxuriously furnished for a room devoted solely to business purposes. But the banker had never been one of those who seem to think that a horsehair chair and a dull chamber are necessary to the labour that brings success. The rich crimson carpet with its soft thick rug threw a warmth of colouring over the room, the fire flashed and sparkled in the grate: for the month was February and the weather was yet wintry.

Before his own desk, in a massive and luxurious arm-chair, sat Mr. Peter Castlemaine. He was a tall, slender, handsome man, fifty-one years old this same month. His hair was dark, his eyes were brown, his complexion was still clear and bright. In manner he was a courteous, but naturally silent man; his private character and his habits were unexceptionable.

No one ever had access to this desk at which he sat: even his confidential old clerk could not remember to have been sent to it for any paper or deed that might be wanted in the outer rooms. The lid of the desk drew over and closed with a spring, so that in an instant its contents could be made safe and fast. The long table in the middle of the room was to-day more than usually covered with papers; a small marble slab between Mr. Peter Castlemaine's left hand and the wall held sundry open ledgers piled one upon another, to which he kept referring. Column after column of figures: the very sight of them sufficient to give an unfinancial man the nightmare: but the banker ran his fingers up and down the rows at railroad speed, for to him it was mere child's play. Seldom has there existed a clearer head for work than that of Peter Castlemaine. But for that he might not have been seated where he was to-day, the chief banker for miles round.

And yet, as he sat there, surrounded by these tokens of wealth and power, his face presented a sad contrast to them and to the ease and luxury of the room. Sad, careworn, anxious, looked he; and, as he now and again paused in his work to pass his hand over his brow, a heavy sigh escaped him. The more he referred to his ledgers, and compared them with figures and papers on the desk before him, so much the more perplexed and harassed did his face become. His eyes had the look of a hunted animal, the look of a drowning man catching at a straw;

the look that must have been in the eyes of poor Louis the Eighteenth when they discovered him in his disguise and turned his horses' heads the way they had come. At last, throwing down his pen, he fell back in his chair, and hid his face in his hands.

"No escape," he murmured, "no escape! Unless a miracle should arise, I am undone."

He remained for some minutes in this attitude, telling so unmistakably of despair, revolving many things: problems working themselves in and out of his brain confusedly, as a man works in and out of a labyrinth, to which he has lost the clue. A small clock on the mantelpiece struck the hour of five, and then chimed an air once popular in France. It was a costly trifle the banker had bought years ago. Paintings, articles of virtu, had always possessed attractions for him.

The silvery chimes aroused him. "I must talk to Hill," he muttered: "no use putting it off until another day." And he touched a small hand-bell.

In answer, the door opened, and there entered a little elderly man with snow-white hair worn long behind, a fair, intellectual face, and eyes beaming with benevolence. He wore a black tail-coat, according to the custom of clerks in that day, and a white cambric frilled shirt like that of his master. It was Thomas Hill; for many years Mr. Peter Castlemaine's confidential clerk and right hand.

"Come in, Hill; come in," said the banker. "Close the door—and lock it."

"The clerks are gone, sir; the last has just left," was the reply. But the old man nevertheless turned the key in the door.

Mr. Peter Castlemaine pointed to a seat near him; and his clerk, quiet in all his movements, as in the tones of his voice, took it in silence. For a full minute they looked at each other; Thomas Hill's face reflecting the uneasiness of his master's. He was the first to speak.

"I know it, sir," he said, his manner betraying the deepest respect and sympathy. "I have seen it coming for a long time. So have you, sir. Why have you not confided in me before?"

"I *could* not," breathed Mr. Peter Castlemaine. "I wanted to put it from me, Hill, as a thing that could never really be.

It has never come so near as it is now, Hill; has never been so real as at this moment."

"It was not my place to take the initiative, sir; but I was always wishing that you would speak to me. I could only place facts and figures before you and point to results, compare past balances with present, other years' transactions with last year's, and—and give you the opportunity of opening the subject with me. But you never did so."

"I have told you why, Hill," said Peter Castlemaine. "I strove to put the whole trouble from me. It was a weak, mistaken feeling; but nine men out of every ten would have been actuated by it under similar circumstances. And yet," he continued, half to himself, "I never was much like other men, and I never knew myself to be weak."

"Never that; never weak," responded the faithful clerk, affectionately.

"I don't know, Hill; I feel so now. This has long been to me as a distant monster, creeping onwards by degrees, advancing each day by stealthy steps. And now it is at hand, ready to crush me."

"I seem unable to understand it," said poor Hill.

"And there are times when I cannot," returned Mr. Peter Castlemaine.

"In the old days, sir, everything you handled turned to gold. You had only to take up a speculation, and it was sure to prove successful. Why, sir, your name has become quite a proverb for good luck. But for some time past things have changed, and instead of success, it has been failure. Sir, it is just as though your hand had lost its cunning."

"True, Hill," sighed his master, "my hand seems to have lost its cunning. It is—I have said it over and over again to myself—as though some fate pursued me. Ill-luck; nothing but ill-luck! If a scheme has looked fair and promising to-day, a blight has fallen on it to-morrow. And I, like a fool, as I see now, plunged into fresh ventures, hoping to redeem the last. How few of us know how to pull up in time! Were all known, the public would say that the mania of gambling must have taken hold of me——"

"No, no," murmured the clerk.

"When it was only the recklessness of a drowning man.

Why, Hill—if I could get in the money at present due to me, money that I think will come in shortly, we should weather the storm."

"I trust it will be weathered, sir, somehow. At the worst, it will not be a bad failure; there will be twenty shillings in the pound if they will only wait. Perhaps, if you called a private meeting and pointed things out, and showed them that you only wanted time, they'd consent to give it you. Matters would go on then, and there would be no exposure."

"It is the want of time that will crush me," said Peter Castlemaine.

"But if they will allow you time, sir?"

"All will not," was the significant answer, and Mr. Peter Castlemaine lowered his voice as he spoke it, and looked full at his clerk. "You know those Armannon bonds?"

Whether it was the tone, the look, or the question, certain it was that in that instant an awful dread, an instinct of evil, fell upon the old man. His face turned white.

"I had to *use* those bonds, Hill," whispered his master. "To mortgage them, you understand. But, as I am a living man, I believed when I did it that in less than a week they would be redeemed and replaced."

"Mortgaged the Armannon bonds!" ejaculated Thomas Hill, utterly unable to take in the fact, and looking the picture of horror.

"And they are not yet redeemed."

The clerk wrung his hands. "My master! How could you? Surely it was done in a moment of madness!"

"Of weakness, of wickedness if you will, Thomas, but not madness. I was as sane as I am now. You remember the heavy payment we had to make last August? It *had* to be made, you know, or things would have come to a crisis then. I used the bonds to raise the money."

"But I—I cannot understand," returned the clerk slowly, after casting back his recollection. "I thought you borrowed that money from Mr. Castlemaine."

"No. Mr. Castlemaine would not lend it to me. I don't know whether he smelt a rat and grew afraid for the rest I hold of his. What he said was, that he had not so large a sum at his disposal. Or, it may be," added the banker in a dreamy

sort of tone, "that James thought I was only going into some fresh speculation, and considers me sufficiently rich already. How little he knows!"

"These deeds must be redeemed!" cried the old clerk, rising from his seat in excitement. "At all sacrifice they must be redeemed. If you have to sell up all, houses, land, everything, they must be returned, sir. You must no longer run this dreadful risk: the fear of it and the suspense would bring me down to my grave."

"Then, what do you suppose it has been doing for me?" rejoined Mr. Peter Castlemaine. "Many a time and oft since then, I have said to myself, 'Next week shall see those bonds replaced.' But the 'next week' has never come: for I have had to use all available cash to keep the house from sinking. Once down, Hill, the truth about the bonds could no longer be concealed."

"You must sell all, sir."

"*There's nothing left to sell, Thomas,*" said his master. "At least, nothing immediately available. It is *time* that is wanted. That given, I could put things straight again."

A trying silence. Thomas Hill's face was full of pain. "I have a little money of my own, sir: some of it I've saved, some came to me when my brother died," he said. "It is about six thousand pounds, and I have neither chick nor child. Every shilling shall be yours, sir, as soon as I can withdraw it from where it is invested."

His master grasped his hands. "Faithful friend!" he cried, the tears of emotion dimming his brown eyes. "Do you think I would accept the sacrifice and bring you to ruin as I have brought myself? Never, Hill."

"The money shall be yours, sir," repeated the clerk firmly.

"Hush, hush!" cried Mr. Peter Castlemaine. "Though I were dying of shame and hunger, I would not take it. And do you not see, my friend, that it would be a useless sacrifice? Six thousand pounds would be swallowed up in the vortex: it would be as a drop of water to the ocean."

It was even so. They sat down together and went into the books: the banker pointing out amounts and involvements the clerk had never suspected before. Ruin seemed to be close at hand; there seemed to be no escape from it. Ordinary failure

Thomas Hill might have got over in time; but the ruin that now threatened his master, would have turned his hair white in a night had it not already turned white with time.

And crimes were more heavily punished in those days than they are in these.

At a quarter to six o'clock, Peter Castlemaine was in his dining-room, dressed for dinner. He often had friends to dine with him on market-days, and was expecting some that night: a small social party of half-a-dozen, himself included. He stood with his back to the fire, his brow smoothed, his aspect that of complete ease; he could hear his butler coming up the stairs to show in the first guest. All the dwelling-rooms were on this first floor, the ground-floor being appropriated to business.

"Mr. Castlemaine."

The two brothers met in the middle of the room and shook hands. Mr. Castlemaine was the elder by two years, but he did not look so, and there was a great likeness between them. Fine, upright, handsome men; with clear, fresh faces, well-cut features, and keen, flashing dark eyes. Very pleasant men to talk to; but reserved as to their own affairs. Mr. Castlemaine had just come in from his residence, Greylands' Rest.

"All well at home, James?"

"Quite so, thank you."

"You were not in at market, to-day."

"No: I had nothing particularly to bring me in. Are you expecting many this evening?"

"Only six of us. Here comes another."

The butler's step was again heard. But this time he came, not to announce a guest, but to bring a note, just delivered. Peter Castlemaine's hand shook slightly as he opened it. He dreaded all letters now. It proved, however, to be only an excuse from one of the expected guests: and a strange relief sat on his face as he turned to his brother.

"Lawrence can't come, James. So there will be only five of us."

"Lawrence is no great loss," said Mr. Castlemaine, slightingly. "You don't look quite yourself, Peter," he added; something in his brother's countenance having struck his observant eye. "I think you work too hard; have thought so for some time. Don't let the love of money take all pleasure

out of life. Surely you must have made sufficient, and might now take some rest."

The banker laughed. "As to taking rest, that's easier said than done, James. I am too young to give up work yet: I should be like a fish out of water."

"Ah well—we are all, I suppose, wedded to our work—whatever it may be: creatures of habit," admitted Mr. Castlemaine. "I will just go and see Mary Ursula. She is in her room, I suppose. What a treasure you possess in that girl, Peter!"

"Beyond all price," was the impulsive answer, and Peter Castlemaine's face glowed as he made it. "Yes, you will find her in her room, James."

Mr. Castlemaine went to the end of the wide passage—lined with paintings, and covered with a carpet, rich and soft as moss—and knocked at a door there. A sweet voice bade him enter.

The small room was brilliantly lighted with wax tapers; the fire threw a warmth on its dainty furniture. A stately lady, tall, slight, and very beautiful, who had been working at a sketch, put down her pencil, and rose. It was Miss Castlemaine, the banker's only child: as fair a picture as could be found in the world. She wore a white muslin dress, made low in the fashion of the day. On her queenly neck was a string of pearls; pearl bracelets clasped her pretty arms. Her face was indeed beautiful: resembling her father's, but more delicately carved; the complexion of a paler and fairer tint; the brown eyes, instead of flashing, as did his in his youth, had a subdued, almost sad look in them. It was one of the sweetest faces ever seen, but altogether its ruling expression was that of sadness: an expression that in her childhood had led many an old woman to say, "She is too good to live." She had lived, however, in strength and health, until now, when she was in her five-and-twentieth year. An accomplished lady, she, very much so for those days, and of excellent sense; her conversational powers great; a brilliant musician, and a fair linguist, fond of sketching and painting in water-colours. With it all, she was very gentle in manner, modest and retiring as a woman should be: there was at all times a repose upon her that was most charming. Her father loved her with an ardent love; he had lost his

wife, and this child was all-in-all to him. But for her sake, he might not have dreaded the coming disgrace with the intense horror he did dread it. His happiest hours were spent with her. In the twilight he would sit in the music-room, listening to her playing on the piano, or the sweet-toned organ he had had built for her—the tones not more sweet than her own voice when raised in song. Her gift of extemporizing amounted to genius; and as the banker sat listening to the organ sounds, he would forget his cares. She was engaged to William Blake-Gordon, the eldest son of Sir Richard Blake-Gordon; a poor, but pompous baronet, unduly proud of his descent. But for the immense fortune Miss Castlemaine was expected to inherit, Sir Richard had never condescended to consent to the match: but the young man loved her for her own sake. Just now Miss Castlemaine was alone: the lady who resided with her as chaperon and companion, Mrs. Webb, having been called away by the illness of a near relative. One word as to her name—Mary Ursula. A somewhat long name to pronounce, but it was rarely shortened by her relatives. The name had been old Mrs. Castlemaine's, her grandmother's, and was reverenced in the family.

"I knew it was you, Uncle James," she said, meeting him with extended hands. "I was sure you would come in to see me."

He took her hands into his, and kissed her tenderly. Mr. Castlemaine was fond of his niece, and very proud of her.

"You are cold, Uncle James."

"Fresh with the night-air, my dear. I walked in."

"All the way from Greylands!"

He laughed. It was only three miles; scarcely that. "I felt inclined for walking, Mary Ursula. The carriage will come in to take me home."

"How is Ethel, Uncle James? And Mrs. Castlemaine?"

"Quite well, my dear. What are you doing here?"

She had sat down to the table again, and he bent his head to look at her drawing. There was a moment's silence.

"Why, it is—the Friar's Keep!" exclaimed Mr. Castlemaine.

"Yes," she answered. "I sketched it in outline when at your house last summer, and I have never filled it in until now."

She sketched as she did everything else—almost perfectly. The resemblance was exact, and Mr. Castlemaine said so. "It seems to me already completed!" he observed.

"All but the shading of the sky."

"Why have you made those two windows darker than the rest?"

Miss Castlemaine smiled as she answered jestingly. "I thought I would give no opportunity for the appearance of the Grey Friar in my drawing, Uncle James."

Mr. Castlemaine drew in his lips. The jest pleased him.

"Have you seen much of the Grey Sisters lately, Uncle James?"

This did *not* please him. And Mary Ursula, as she caught the involuntary frown, felt vexed to have asked the question. Not for the first time, as she recalled, had Mr. Castlemaine shown displeasure at the mention of the "Grey Sisters."

"Why do you not like them, Uncle James?"

"I cannot help thinking that Greylands might get on better if it were rid of them," was the short reply of Mr. Castlemaine. But he passed at once from the subject.

"And we are not to have this fair young hostess to head the table to-night?" he cried, in a different and a warm tone, as he gazed affectionately at his niece. "Mary Ursula, it is a sin. I wish some customs were changed! And you will be alone!"

"'Never less alone than when alone,'" quoted Mary Ursula: "and that is true of me, uncle mine. But to-night I shall not be alone in any sense, for Agatha Mountsorrel is coming to bear me company."

"Agatha Mountsorrel! I don't like her, my dear. She is desperately high and mighty."

"All the Mountsorrels are that—with their pedigree and their wealth, I suppose they think they have reason for it—but I do like her. And I fancy that is her carriage we hear now. There's six o'clock, uncle; and you will keep the soup waiting."

Six was striking from the small silver-gilt timepiece. "I suppose I must go," said Mr. Castlemaine. "I would rather spend the evening with you."

"Oh, Uncle James, think of the baked meats!" she laughed. "The nectar-cup!"

"What are baked meats and nectar-cups to the brightness of thine eyes, the sweet discourse of thy lips? There's not thy equal in this world, Mary Ursula."

"Uncle, you would spoil me. Flattery is a subtle poison, that in time destroys sound health."

"Fare you well, then, my dear. I will come and say good-night to you before leaving."

As Mr. Castlemaine trod the corridor, he met Miss Mountsorrel coming up: a handsome, proud girl in a scarlet cloak and hood. She returned his salute with a sweeping bow, and passed on her way in silence.

The dinner was one of those perfect little repasts the banker was renowned for. The three other guests were Sir Richard Blake-Gordon; the Reverend John Marston, vicar of St. Mark's and also of Greylands, generally called by the public "Parson Mas'on;" and Mr. Knivett, family solicitor to the Castlemaines. The wines were excellent; the reunion was altogether sociable and pleasant; and the banker's brow gave no indication of the strife within. True, Mr. Marston took his full share of the wine—as many a parson then appeared to think it quite orthodox to do—and talked rather too much accordingly. But the guests enjoyed themselves; and broke up before eleven. Mr. Castlemaine, who could drink his wine with any man, but took care never to take more than he could carry as a gentleman, proceeded to his niece's room to say good-night to her; as he had promised.

"I hope I have not kept you up, my dear," he began as he entered.

"Oh no, Uncle James," was Mary Ursula's answer. "I never go to my room until I have sung the evening hymn to papa."

"Where's Miss Mountsorrel?"

"The carriage came for her at ten o'clock."

"And pray where's Master William, that he has not been here this evening?"

She blushed like a June rose. "Do you think he is here *every* evening, Uncle James? Mrs. Webb warned him in time that it would not be etiquette, especially whilst she was away. And how have you enjoyed yourself?"

"Passably. The baked meats you spoke of were tempting;

the nectar was good. Of which nectar, in the shape of a dinner port, the parson took slightly more than was necessary. What toast, do you suppose, he suddenly gave us?"

"How can I tell?" she rejoined, looking up.

"We were talking of you at the moment, and the parson rose to his legs, glass in hand. 'Here's to the fairest and sweetest maiden in the universe,' said he, 'and may she soon be Lady Blake-Gordon!'"

"Oh, how could he!" exclaimed Miss Castlemaine, colouring painfully in her distress. "And Sir Richard present!"

"As to Sir Richard, I thought he was going frantic. You know what he is. 'Zounds! Sir Parson,' he cried, starting up in his turn, 'do you wish me dead? Is it not enough that the young lady should first become *Mistress* Blake-Gordon? Am I so old and useless as to be wished out of the world for the sake of my son's aggrandisement?'—and so on. Marston pacified him at last, protesting that he had only said Mistress Blake-Gordon; or that, if he had not, he had so meant it. And now, good-night, my dear, for I don't care to keep my horses standing longer in the cold. When are you coming to stay at Greylands' Rest?"

"Whenever you like to invite me, Uncle James. I wish you could get papa over for a week. It would give him rest: and he has not appeared very well of late. He seems full of care."

"Of business, my dear; not care. Though, of course, undertakings such as his must bring care with them. You propose it to him; and come with him: if he will come for any one's asking, it is yours."

"You will give my love to Ethel; and——"

Mr. Castlemaine, stooping to kiss her, arrested the words with a whisper.

"When is it to be, Mary Ursula? When shall we be called upon to congratulate Mistress Blake-Gordon? Soon?"

"Oh, I don't know." And she laughed and blushed, and felt confused at the outspoken words: but in her inmost heart was happy as a queen.

CHAPTER II.

THE GREY LADIES.

A ROMANTIC, picturesque fishing-village was that of Greylands, as secluded as any English village can well be. Stilborough was an inland town; Greylands was on the sea-coast. The London coaches, on their way from Stilborough to the great city, would traverse the three miles of dreary road lying between the town and Greylands, dash suddenly, as it were, upon the sea on entering the village, and then, turning sharply off by the Dolphin Inn, proceed on its inland road again. As to London, it was so far off, or seemed so in those quiet days, that the villagers would as soon have undertaken a journey to the moon.

The first object to be seen on drawing near to Greylands from Stilborough, was the small church; an old stone building on the left, its graveyard around it. On the opposite side of the road the cliffs rose high, and the sea could not be seen for them. The Reverend John Marston held the living of Greylands in conjunction with St. Mark's, Stilborough: the two had always gone together, and even the combined income was small. Mr. Marston was fond of fox-hunting in winter, and of good dinners at all seasons: as many other parsons were then. Greylands did not receive much benefit from him. He was non-resident, as the parsons there had always been, for he lived at St. Mark's. Of course, with two churches and only one parson for both, the services could not go on together, for no one can be doing duty in two places at once. Once a month, on the third Sunday, Mr. Marston hurried over to Greylands to hold morning service, beginning at twelve, having rushed through the prayers (no sermon that day) at St. Mark's first. On the three other Sundays he held the Greylands service at three in the afternoon. So that, excepting for this Sunday service, held at somewhat uncertain hours—for the easy-going parson did not always keep his time, and on occasion had been known to fail altogether—Greylands was absolutely without pastoral care.

Descending onwards—a sharp descent—past the church, the cliffs on the right soon ended abruptly; and the whole village, lying in the hollow, seemed to burst upon you suddenly. It was very open, very wide just there. The beach was flat and bare to the sea, sundry fishing-boats lying high and dry there: others would be out upon the water, catching fish. Huts and cottages were built on the side of the rocks; and some few on the beach. On the left stood the Dolphin Inn, looking straight across the wide road to the beach and the sea; past which inn the coach-road branched off inland again.

The street—if it could be called one—continued to wind on up the village. Let us follow this street. It is steep and circuitous, and for a short distance solitary. Half-way up the ascent, on the left, and built on the sea-coast, rises the pile of old buildings called the Grey Nunnery. This pile stands back from the road beyond a narrow strip of waste land on which grass grows. The cliff is low there, and the Grey Nunnery is built so near the edge, that the waves dash against its lower walls at high water. The back of the building is towards the road, the front looks upon the sea. A portion of it is in ruins; but this end of it is quite habitable, and here live twelve ladies, who are called the Grey Sisters, or sometimes the Grey Ladies, and who devote themselves to charity and to doing good. In surmises went abroad freely: you cannot silence people: and very frequently when nothing is known tongues flow all the faster. Some thought it was left to James *in trust* for Basil; but no one knew, and the Castlemaines were close men, who never talked of their own affairs. The estate of Greylands' Rest was supposed to be worth about twelve hundred a-year. It was the only portion of old Mr. Castlemaine's property that there could be any doubt or surmise about: what money he had to dispose of, he had divided during his lifetime between James and Peter; Basil having taken his at starting. James Castlemaine was the only gentleman of importance living at Greylands; he was looked up to as a sort of feudal chief by its inhabitants generally, and swayed them at will.

Following the coach-road that led off by the Dolphin for about half-a-mile, you came to a long green avenue on the right, which was the chief approach to Greylands' Rest. It was an

convent lived in it, together with some holy men, his brethren. A vast pile of buildings it must have been in its day; and some of the traditions said that this Friar's Keep was in fact a monastery, divided from the nunnery by the chapel. A wild, desolate place it must have been, looking down on the turbulent sea. Tales and stories were still told of those days: of the jolly monks, of the secluded nuns, tales good and bad—just as tales in the generations to come will be told of the present day. But, whatever scandal may have been whispered, whatever dark deeds of the ruder ages, none could be whispered of the building now. The only inhabited part of it, that occupied by the good Sisters, who were blameless and self-denying in their lives, who lived only to do good, was revered by all. *That* portion of it was open, fair, and above-board; but mysterious ideas existed in regard to the Friar's Keep. It was said to be haunted.

Now, such a report, attaching to a building of any kind, would be laughed at in these later times. For one who accepted the superstition, twenty would ridicule it. The simple villagers around believed it religiously: it was said that the Castlemaines, who were educated gentlemen, and anything but simple, believed it also. The Friar's Keep was known to be uninhabited, and part of it was abandoned to the owls and the bats. This was indisputable. Nevertheless, now and again glimpses of a light would be seen within the rooms by some benighted passer-by, and people were not wanting who asserted that a ghostly form, habited in a friar's light grey cowl and skirts, would appear at the casement windows, bearing a lamp. Strange noises had also been heard—or were said to have been heard. Not a single inhabitant of the village, man or woman, would have dared to cross the chapel ruins and enter the Friar's Keep alone after nightfall, had it been to save their lives. It did not want foundation, this superstition. Tales were whispered of a dreadful crime that had been committed by one of the monks: it transpired abroad; and, to avoid the consequences of being punished by his brethren—who of course could only punish him after public discovery, whatever they might have done without it—he had destroyed himself in a certain room, in the grey habit of his order, and was destined to "come abroad" for ever after. So the story ran,

and so it was credited. The good ladies at the Nunnery were grieved when allusion was made to the superstition in their presence, and would have put it down if they could. They never saw anything themselves, were never disturbed by sounds: but, as the credulous villagers would remark to one another in private, the Sisters were the very last people who would be likely to see and hear. They were not sufficiently near to the Friar's Keep, and the casements in the Keep could not be seen from their own casements.

The narrow strip of waste land, standing between the street and the Grey Nunnery is enclosed by somewhat high palings. They run along the entire length of the building, and have two entrance-gates. The one gate is opposite the porch-door of the Grey Nunnery; the other leads into the chapel ruins. It should be mentioned that there was no door or other communication between the Nunnery and the site of the chapel, and it did not appear that there ever had been: so that, if any one wished to pass from the Nunnery to the ruins or the Friar's Keep, they must go round by the road and enter at the other gate. The chapel wall, not more than three feet high, extended down to the palings, cutting off the Nunnery and its waste ground from the ruins.

In their secluded home lived these blameless ladies, ever doing good. In a degree they served to replace the loss of a resident pastor. Many a sick and dying bed that ought to have been Mr. Marston's care, had they soothed; more than one frail infant, passing away almost as soon as born, had Sister Mildred, the pious Superior, after a few moments spent on her knees in silent prayer, taken upon herself to baptize, that it might be numbered as of the Fold of Christ. They regretted that the clergyman was not more amongst them, but there it ended: the clergy of those days were not the active men of these, neither were they expected to be so. The Grey Ladies paid Mr. Marston every respect, and encouraged others to do so: and they were strict attendants at his irregular Sunday services.

The origin of the sisterhood was this. Many years before, a Miss Mildred Grant, being in feeble health, had gone to Greylands for change of air. As she made acquaintance with the fishermen and other poor families, she was struck by their

benighted condition, both as to spiritual and temporal need. She resolved to do what she could to improve this; thought it might be a solemn duty placed purposely in her path; and she took up her abode at one of the cottages, and was joined by her sister, Mary Grant. In course of time other ladies, wishing to devote their lives to good works, joined them. At length a sisterhood of twelve was formed, and they took possession of that abandoned place, the Grey Nunnery. Six of these ladies were gentlewomen by birth and breeding; and these six had brought some portion of fortune with them. Six were inferior. These were received without money, and in lieu thereof made themselves useful, taking it in turns to see to the housekeeping, to do the domestic work, go on errands, made and mend the clothes, and so forth. All were treated alike, wearing the same dress, taking their meals together—excepting the two who might be on domestic duty for the week. At first the Sisterhood had attracted much attention and caused some public talk—for such societies were then almost unknown; but Greylands was secluded, and this soon died away. Sister Mildred remained its head, and she was getting in years now. She was a clever, practical woman, without having received much education, though a lady by birth. Latterly she had been in very bad health; and she had always laboured under the defect of partial deafness. Her sister Mary had died early.

Immediately beyond the Friar's Keep the rocks rose abruptly again, and the sea there, and for some little way onwards, was inaccessible to the eye. Further on, the heights were tolerably flat, and there the preventive men were enabled to pace to and fro—which they did assiduously: for those were the days of smuggling, when fortunes were made by it and sometimes lives were marred. The coastguard had a small station just beyond the village, and the officers looked pretty sharply after the beach and the doings of the fishermen.

Just opposite the Friar's Keep, on the other side the road, was a lane, called Chapel Lane, flanking a large clump of trees, almost a grove. Within these trees rose a small, low, thatched building, styled The Hutt. The gentleman inhabiting this dwelling, a slight, bronzed, upright and active man, with black eyes and black hair, was named Teague. Formerly an officer on board a man-of-war, he had saved enough for a competency

through prize-money and other things, and had also a pension. The village called him Commodore: he would have honestly told you himself that he had no right to that exalted rank—but he did not in the least object to the distinction. He was a great favourite with the village, from the coastguardsmen to the poor fishermen, was fond of treating them in his Hutt, or of giving them a sail in his boat, or a seat in his covered spring-cart—both of which articles he kept for pleasure. In habits he was somewhat peculiar; living alone without a servant of any kind, male or female, and waiting on himself.

Chapel Lane—a narrow, pleasant lane, with trees meeting overhead, and wild flowers adorning its banks and hedges in summer—led into the open country, and went directly past Greylands' Rest, the residence of the Castlemaines. This lane was not the chief approach to the house: that was by the high coach-road that branched off by the Dolphin Inn. And this brings us to speak of the Castlemaines.

Greylands' Rest, and the estate on which it stood, had been purchased many years before by the head and chief of the family, Anthony Castlemaine. His children grew up there. He had three sons—Basil, James, and Peter. Basil was three or four years the elder, for a little girl between him and James had died; and if he were living at the present time, he would be drawing towards sixty years of age. It was not known whether he was living or not. Anthony Castlemaine had been a harsh and hasty man; and Basil was wild and wilful. After a good deal of unpleasantness at home, and some bitter quarrelling between father and son, in which the two younger sons took part against their brother, Basil quitted his home and went abroad. At that time he was twenty-two, and had come into possession of a very fair sum of money, which fell to him from his late mother. The two other sons came into the same on attaining their majority. Besides this, Mr. Castlemaine handed over to Basil his portion, so that he went away rich. He went into the world to seek his fortune and to get rid of his unnatural relatives, he informed his friends in Greylands and Stilborough, and he hoped never to return until Greylands' Rest was his. He never had returned all those years, something like five-and-twenty now, and they had never heard from him directly, though once or twice incidentally. The last time

was about four years ago, when chance news came to them that he was alive and well.

James Castlemaine had remained with his father at Greylands' Rest, managing the land on the estate. Peter had taken his portion and set up as a banker at Stilborough; we have seen with what success. James married, and took his wife home to Greylands' Rest; but she died soon, leaving him a little son. Several years subsequently he married again: a widow; and she was the present Mrs. Castlemaine.

Old Anthony Castlemaine lived on, year after year, at Greylands' Rest, wondering whether he should ever see his eldest son again. With all Basil's faults, he had been his father's favourite: and the old man grew to long for him. It was more than either of Basil's brothers did. Basil had had his portion from both father and mother, and so they washed their hands of him, as the two were wont to observe, and they did not want him back again. They, at least, had their wish, though Mr. Castlemaine had not. The old man lived to the age of eighty-five and then died without seeing his eldest son; without, in fact, being sure that he was still living. It was not so very long now since old Anthony had died: they had just gone out of mourning for him. James had come into Greylands' Rest on his father's death: or, at any rate, had remained in possession; but of the true facts nothing transpired. Rumours and spite of the name, they are of the Reformed Faith; sound Protestants: a community poor in funds, but rich in goodness. They keep a few beds for the sick amongst the villagers, or for accidents; and they have a day school for the village children. If they could get better children to educate, they would be glad of them; and some of the ladies are accomplished gentlewomen. Mr. Castlemaine, who is, as may be said, chief of the village of Greylands, looking down on it from his mansion, Greylands' Rest, does not countenance these Sisters: he does the opposite, in fact, and has been heard to ridicule the ladies. The Master of Greylands, the title generally accorded him, is no empty form, for in most things his will is law.

Beyond the part of the building thus inhabited, a portion lies in ruin; it was the chapel in the days of the monks, but its walls are low now. Yet beyond it comes another portion, still in tolerable preservation, called the Friar's Keep. It was said to have gained its name from the fact that the confessor to the

old house, built of grey stone; a straggling, spacious, comfortable mansion, only two stories high. Before the old-fashioned porch-entrance lay a fine green lawn, with seats under the trees, and beds of flowers. Stables, barns, kitchen gardens, and more lawns and flower-beds lay around. The rooms within were many, but rather small; and most of them had to be approached by a narrow passage: as is sometimes the case in ancient, substantially-built houses. From the upper rooms at the side of the house could be seen, just opposite, the Friar's Keep, its casements and its broken upper walls; Commodore Teague's Hutt lying exactly in a line between the two buildings. Beyond all might be caught glimpses of the glorious sea.

It was a cold, bright day in February, the day following the dinner at the banker's. Mr. Castlemaine was busy in his study—a business-room, where he kept his farming accounts, and wrote his letters—which was on the upper floor of the house, looking towards the sea and the Friar's Keep, and was approached from the wide corridor by a short narrow passage having a door at either end. The inner door Mr. Castlemaine often kept locked. In a pretty room below, warm and comfortable, and called the Red Room from its prevalent colour, its ceiling low, its windows opening to the lawn, but closed to-day, sat the ladies of his family: Mrs. Castlemaine, her daughter Flora, and Ethel Reene.

It has been said that James Castlemaine's second wife was a widow. Her first marriage had also been to a widower, Mr. Reene, who had one daughter, Ethel. Mrs. Reene never took to this step-child; she was jealous of Mr. Reene's affection for her; and when, on Mr. Reene's death, which occurred shortly after the marriage, it was found that he had left considerably more money to his child than to his new wife, Mrs. Reene's dislike was completed. A year or two after her marriage with Mr. Castlemaine, a little girl, Flora, was born to her. On this, her only child, she lavished all her love—but she had none for Ethel. Mr. Castlemaine, on his part, gave the greater portion of his affection to his son, the child of his first wife, Harry. A very fine young man now, of some five-and-twenty years, was Harry Castlemaine, and his father was wrapped up in him. Ethel addressed Mr. and Mrs. Castlemaine as "papa" and "mamma," but she was in point of fact not related to either.

She was five years old when she came to Greylands' Rest, had grown up there as a child of the house, and was often called, out of doors, "Miss Castlemaine."

Ethel seemed to stand alone without kith or kin, with no one to love or care for her; and she felt it keenly. As much as a young lady can be snubbed in a gentleman's well-appointed family, Ethel Reene was snubbed. Mr. Castlemaine was always kind to her, though perhaps somewhat indifferent; Mrs. Castlemaine was unkind and tyrannical; Flora—an indulged, selfish, ill-bred girl of twelve, sufficiently forward in some things for one twice her age—did her best to annoy her in all ways. And Mrs. Castlemaine permitted this: she could see no fault in Flora, she hated Ethel. Ethel Reene was now nineteen, fast growing into womanhood; but she was young for her age, and of a charming simplicity—not so rare in girls then as it is now. She was good, gentle, and beautiful; with a pale, quiet beauty that slowly conquers the heart, but as surely remains there. Her large eyes, full of depth, sweetness and feeling, gazed at you with almost the straightforward innocence of a child: and no child's heart could have been more free from guile. Her hair was dark, her features were refined and delicate, her appearance altogether ladylike and attractive.

Ethel Reene had much to put up with in her everyday life: for Mrs. Castlemaine's conduct was trying in the extreme; Flora's more than trying. She seldom retaliated: having learnt how useless retaliation was against them: and, besides, she loved peace. But she was not without spirit: and only she knew what it had cost her to learn to keep that spirit under control. Sometimes when matters went too far, she would check her step-mother's angry torrent by a few firm words, and quietly leave the room to take refuge in the peace and solitude of her own chamber. Or she would put on her bonnet and wander away to the cliffs; where, seated on the extreme edge, she would remain for hours, looking at the sea. She had once been fond of taking her place in the chapel ruins, and sitting there, contemplating the expanse of ocean, which was grand and beautiful; sometimes, when the water was low, so that the strip of beach beneath could be gained, she would scale the short but dangerous rock to it—the strip of beach being only accessible from the chapel ruins and at low tide.

But one day Mr. Castlemaine, happening to see her doing this, angrily and absolutely forbade her, not only to descend the rocks, but to enter, under any pretence, the chapel ruins. Ethel was not one to disobey.

But to sit on the higher rocks, near the coastguard station, was not denied her; Mr. Castlemaine only enjoining her to be cautious. It had grown to be her favourite spot, and she often sat or walked there on the edge of the cliff. The ever-changing water seemed to bring consolation to her spirit; it spoke to her in strange, soothing whispers; it fed the romance and the dreams that lie in a young girl's heart. When the sea was rough and the waves dashed against the cliffs, flinging upward their spray, she would stand, lost in the grandeur of the scene, her hat off and held by its ribbons, her hair floating in the wind: the sky and the waves seeming to whisper to her soul of immortality; to bring nearer to her the far-off gates of heaven. And so, for want of suitable companionship, Ethel Reene shared her secrets with the sea.

The glass-doors of the red room were closed to-day against the east wind; the lawn, though bright with sunshine, lay cold under its bare wintry trees. Mrs. Castlemaine sat by the fire working at a pair of slippers; a little woman, she, dressed in striped green silk, with light hair, and a peevish look on what had once been a very pretty, though sharp-featured face. Ethel sat near the window, drawing; she wore a bright ruby winter dress of fine merino, with some white lace at the throat and sleeves; a blue ribbon, to which was suspended some small gold ornament, encircled her delicate neck; beads of gold were in her ears; and her pretty cheeks were flushed, for Mrs. Castlemaine was in dispute and making her feel very angry. Flora, a restless damsel, in a flounced brown frock and white pinafore, with a fair, pretty, saucy face, her flaxen curls tied back with blue ribbon, was perched on the music-stool before Ethel's piano, striking barbarous chords with one hand and abusing Ethel alternately.

The dispute to-day was this. Miss Oldham, Flora's governess, had lately given warning, and left Greylands' Rest precipitately, tired out, as every one but Mrs. Castlemaine knew, with her pupil's insolence. Mrs. Castlemaine had not yet found any one willing, or whom she deemed eligible, to replace

her—for it must be remembered that governesses then were somewhat rare. Weary of waiting, Mrs. Castlemaine had come to a sudden determination, and was now announcing it: Ethel should have the honour of filling the post.

"It is of no use, mamma," said Ethel. "I could not teach; I am sure I am not fitted for it. And, you know, Flora would never obey *me*."

"That I wouldn't," put in Miss Flora, wheeling half round on the stool. "I hate governesses; and they do me no good, I don't know half as much as I did when Miss Oldham came, twelve months ago. Do I, mamma?"

"I fear you do not, my darling," replied Mrs. Castlemaine, "Miss Oldham's system of teaching was quite a failure, and she sadly neglected her duty; but——"

"Oh, mamma," interrupted Flora, peevishly, "don't put in that horrid 'but.' I tell you I hate governesses; I'm not going to have another. Nothing but lessons, lessons, lessons, all day long, just as though you wanted *me* to be a governess!"

"If you did not learn, Flora, you would grow up a little heathen," Ethel ventured to remark. "You would not like that."

"Now don't you put in your word," retorted the girl, passionately. "It's not your place to interfere with me: is it, mamma?"

"Certainly not, my sweet child."

Miss Flora had changed her position. Quitting the music-stool for the hearthrug, she took up the poker; and now stood brandishing it around, and looking daggers at Ethel. Ethel, her face still flushed, went steadily on with her drawing.

"She's as ill-natured as she can be! She'd like to see me toiling at geography and French grammar all night as well as all day. Nasty thing!"

"I can believe anything of Ethel that is ill-natured," equably spoke Mrs. Castlemaine, turning her slipper. "But I have made up my mind that she shall teach you, Flo, my love, under—of course, entirely under—my superintendence. Miss Oldham used to resent interference."

"I do think, mamma, you must be joking!" cried Ethel, turning her flushed face and her beautiful eyes on her step-mother.

"When do I joke?" retorted Mrs. Castlemaine. "It will save the nuisance of a governess in the house: *and you shall teach Flora.*"

"I'll give her all the trouble I can; she's a toad," cried Miss Flora, bringing the poker within an inch of her mother's nose. "And I'll learn just what I like, and let alone what I don't like. *She's* not going to be set up in authority over me, as Miss Oldham was. I'll pinch you if you try it, Ethel."

"Stop, stop," spoke Ethel, firmness in her tone, decision on her pretty lips. "Mamma, pray understand me; I cannot attempt to do this. My life is not very pleasant now; it would be unbearable then. You know—you see—what Flora is: how can you ask me?"

Mrs. Castlemaine half rose, in her angry spirit. It was something new for Ethel to set her commands at defiance. Her voice turned shrill; her small light eyes dilated.

"Do you defy me in my own house, Ethel? I say that you *shall* do this. I am mistress here——"

Mistress she might be, but Mr. Castlemaine was master, and at that moment the door opened, and he came in. Disputes were not very unusual in his home, but this seemed to be a frantic one.

"What is the meaning of this?" he inquired, halting in astonishment, and taking in the scene with his keen dark eyes. His wife unusually angry, her voice high; Ethel in tears—for they had come unbidden; Flora brandishing the poker and dancing about.

Mrs. Castlemaine sat down to resume her wool-work, her ruffled feathers subdued to smoothness. She never cared to give way to unseemly temper, no, nor to injustice, in the presence of her husband; for she had the grace to feel that he would be ashamed of it—ashamed for her; and that it would still further weaken the little influence she retained over him.

"Were you speaking of a governess for Flora?" he asked, advancing and taking the poker from the young lady's hand. "What has Ethel to do with that?"

"I was observing that Ethel has a great deal of leisure time, and that she might, rather than be idle, fill it up by teaching Flora," replied Mrs. Castlemaine, in the softest tones she could

assume. "Especially as Ethel's French is so perfect. As a temporary thing, of course, if—if it did not answer."

"I do not find Ethel idle: she always seems to me to have some occupation in hand," observed Mr. Castlemaine. "As to her undertaking to teach Flora—would you like it, Ethel?"

"No, papa," was the brave answer, as she strove to hide her tears. "I have, I am sure, no talent for teaching; I dislike it very much: and Flora would never obey a word I said. It would make my life miserable—I was saying so when you came in."

"Then, my dear child, the task shall certainly not be put upon you. Why need you have feared it would be? We have no more right to force Ethel to do what is distasteful to her, than we should have to force it on ourselves," he added, turning to his wife. "You must see that, Sophia."

"But——" began Mrs. Castlemaine.

"No buts, as to this," he interrupted. "You are well able to pay and keep a governess—and, as Ethel justly observes, she would not be able to do anything with Flora. Miss Oldham could not do it. My opinion is, no governess ever will do it, so long as you spoil the child."

"I don't spoil her, James."

Mr. Castlemaine lifted his dark eyebrows: the assertion was too palpably untrue to be worthy of refutation. "The better plan to adopt with Flora would be to send her to school, as Harry says——"

"That I will never do."

"Then look out for a successor to Miss Oldham. And, my strong advice to you, Sophia, is—let the governess, when she comes, have entire control over Flora and be allowed to punish her when she deserves it. I shall not care to see her grow up the self-willed, unlovable child she seems to be now."

Mrs. Castlemaine folded up her slipper quietly and left the room; she was boiling over with rage, in spite of her apparent calmness. Flora, who stood in fear of her father, flew off to the kitchen, to demand bread-and-jam and worry the servants. Ethel was going on with her drawing; and Mr. Castlemaine, who had a taste for sketching himself, went and looked over her.

"Thank you, papa," she murmured, lifting her loving eyes

to his for a moment. "It would have been bad both for Flora and for me."

"Of course it would," he replied: "Flora ought to have a tight rein over her. What's this you are doing, Ethel? The Friar's Keep! Why, a curious coincidence! Mary Ursula was filling in just the same thing last night."

"Was she, papa? It makes a pretty sketch."

"You don't draw as well as Mary Ursula does, Ethel."

"I do nothing as well as she does, papa. I don't think any one does."

"What are those figures in the foreground?"

"I meant them for two of the Grey Sisters. Their cloaks are not finished yet."

"Oh," said Mr. Castlemaine, rather shortly. "And that's a group of fishermen, I see: much the more sensible people of the two."

"What did Mary Ursula say last night, papa?"

"Say? Nothing particular. She sent her love to Ethel."

"Did she dine at table?"

"Why, of course not, child. Miss Mountsorrel spent the evening with her."

"And, papa," whispered Ethel, with a pretty little laugh and blush, "is it decided yet?"

"Is what decided?"

"The wedding-day."

"I don't think so—or you would have heard of it. I expect she will ask you to be her bridesmaid."

CHAPTER III.

AT THE DOLPHIN INN.

THE Dolphin Inn was a substantial, low-roofed house, painted yellow, with a flaming sign-board in front, bearing a dolphin of many colours, and two low bow-windows on either side the door. Beyond lay a yard with out-houses and stables, and there was some good land behind. Along the wall, under the parlour windows and on either side the entrance, ran a bench *which way*farers might use; at right angles with it, near the

yard, was a pump with a horse-trough beside it. Upon a pinch, the inn could supply a pair of post-horses: but they were seldom called for, as Stilborough was so near. It was the only inn of any sort at Greylands, and was frequented by the fishermen, as well as by more important guests occasionally. The landlord was John Bent. The place was his own, and had been his father's before him. He was considered to be a "warm" man, able to live at his ease, irrespective of custom. John Bent was independent in manner and speech, excepting to his wife. Mrs. Bent, a thrifty, bustling, talkative woman, had taken John's independence out of him at first setting out, as far as she was concerned; but they got on very well together. To Mr. Castlemaine especially John was given to showing independence. They were civil to each other, but there was no love lost between them. Mr. Castlemaine would have liked to purchase the Dolphin and the land attached to it: he had made more than one strong overture to do so, which John had resisted and resented. The landlord, too, had taken up an idea that Mr. Castlemaine did not encourage the sojourn of strangers at the inn; but had done his best in a quiet way to discourage it, as was observed in regard to the Grey Ladies. Altogether John Bent did not favour the Master of Greylands.

On one of the days of this self-same February, when the air was keen and frosty and the sea sparkled in the afternoon sunshine, John Bent and his wife sat in the room which they generally occupied, and which they called the best kitchen. The room was on the side of the house, the large, low window and the door facing the beach. Outside this window was another of those hospitable benches, for customers to rest on when it pleased them to call for ale. Mrs. Bent herself liked to sit there when work was over, and criticise the village doings. Whatever the weather, this door, like the front one, stood open; and familiar guests, or neighbours stepping in for a gossip, would enter by it.

Mrs. Bent stood at the table before the window picking shrimps for potting. She was slim and active, with dark curls on either side her thin and comely face. Her cap was adorned with her favourite cherry-coloured ribbons and flying strings; her chintz-pattern cotton gown was drawn through the pocket-hole, displaying a dark stuff petticoat, and neat shoes and

stockings. John Bent sat as near to the blazing fire as he could get his wooden chair in, reading the *Stilborough Herald.*

"It's uncommon cold to-day!" he exclaimed presently, shrugging his shoulders. "The wind comes in and cuts one like a knife. Don't you think, Dorothy, we might shut that door a bit, these sharp days?"

"No, I don't," said Mrs. Bent.

"You'll catch rheumatism before the winter's over, as sure as you're a living woman. Or I shall."

"Shall I?" retorted Mrs. Bent, in her sharply decisive tones. "Over forty years of age I am now, and I've been here nigh upon twenty, and never had a touch of it yet. I am not going to begin to shut doors and windows, John Bent, to please you or anybody else."

Thus put down, John resigned himself to his paper again. He was a spare, middle-sized man, a few years older than his wife, with a red healthy face and scanty grey hair. Presently he laid the newspaper aside, and sat watching his wife's nimble fingers.

"Dorothy, woman, when those shrimps are done, you might send a pot over to poor Sister Mildred. She's uncommon weak, they say."

The very idea that had been running through Mrs. Bent's own mind. But she did not receive the suggestion amiably.

"Suppose you attend to your own concerns, John. If I am to supply the parish with shrimps gratis, it's about time I left off potting."

John picked up his paper again with composure: he was accustomed to all this: and just then a shadow fell across the room. A man was standing at the open door with some fish for sale.

"It's you, Tim, is it?" cried Mrs. Bent, in her shrillest tones. "It's not often *your* lazy limbs bring me anything worth buying. What is it to-day?"

"A splendid cod, Mrs. Bent," replied the man. "Never was finer caught."

"And a splendid price, I'll be bound!" returned the landlady, stepping aside to inspect the fish. "What is it?"

Tim named the price; putting on a little to allow for the

bargaining he knew would ensue. Mrs. Bent spoke loudly in her wrath.

"Now look here, Tim Gleeson!—do you think I'm made of money? I'll give you just half the sum. If you don't like it you may take yourself off and your fish with you."

Mrs. Bent had the cod at her price. She had returned to her shrimps, when, after a gentle tap at the open door, there entered one of the Grey Sisters. Sister Ann—whose week it was to help in the domestic work and to go on errands—was a busy, cheerful, sensible woman, as fond of talking as Mrs. Bent herself. She was dressed entirely in grey; and from the dress had arisen the name given to them of the Grey Ladies.

"Lack-a-day! these shrimps will never get done!" cried Mrs. Bent, under her breath. "How d'ye do, Sister Ann?" she said aloud, her tones less sharp, out of respect to the Order. "You look as blue as bad news. I hope there's no fresh sickness or accident about."

"It's the east wind," replied Sister Ann. "Coming round that beach corner, it seizes hold of one. I've such a pain here with it," indicating her chest, "that I can hardly draw my breath."

"Cramps," said Mrs. Bent, shortly. "John," turning sharply on her husband, "you'd better get Sister Ann a spoonful or two of that cordial, instead of sitting roasting your face at that fire till it's the colour of red pepper."

"Not for worlds," interposed Sister Ann, really meaning it. But John, at the hospitable suggestion, had moved away.

"I have come over to ask if you'll be good enough to let me have a small pot of currant jelly, Mrs. Bent," continued the Grey Sister. "It is for Sister Mildred, poor thing——"

"Is she no better?" interrupted Mrs. Bent.

"Not a bit. And her lips are so parched, poor lady, and her deafness is so worrying——"

"Oh, as to her deafness, *that*'ll never be better," cried Mrs. Bent. "It will get worse as she grows older."

"It can't be much worse than it is: it has always been bad," returned Sister Ann, who seemed slightly to resent the infirmity. "We have had a good bit of sickness in the village, and our black currant jelly is all gone: not that we made much, being poor. If you will let me buy a pot from you, Mrs. Bent, we shall be glad."

For answer, Mrs. Bent left her shrimps, unlocked a corner cupboard, and put two small pots of jelly into the Sister's hand.

"I am not sure that I can afford both to-day," said Sister Ann, dubiously. "How much are they?"

"Nothing," returned Mrs. Bent. "Not one farthing will I take from the ladies: I'm always glad to do the little I can for any of you. Give them to Sister Mildred with my respects; and please say that when I've done my shrimps I'll bring her over a pot of them. I was intending to do it before you came in."

The landlord returned with something in a wine-glass, and stopped the Sister's thanks by making her drink it. Putting the jelly in her basket, Sister Ann, who had no time for a longer gossip that day, gratefully departed.

"It's well the Master of Greylands didn't hear you promise the shrimps and give her the two pots of jelly, wife," cried John Bent, with a short laugh. "He wouldn't have liked it."

"The Master of Greylands may lump it. What I choose to do, I *do*, thank goodness, without asking leave of anybody," returned independent Mrs. Bent.

"I can't think what puts Mr. Castlemaine against 'em," debated John Bent, thoughtfully. "Unless he fancies that if they were less busy over religion, we might get the parson here more as a regular thing."

"We should be none the better for him," snapped Mrs. Bent. "For my part, I don't see much good in parsons," she candidly added. "They only get into people's way."

The silence that ensued was broken by a sound of horses in the distance, and the blowing of a horn. John Bent and his wife looked simultaneously at the eight-day clock, ticking in its mahogany case by the fire, and saw that it was on the stroke of four, which was the time the London coach came by. John passed through the house to the front-door; his wife, after glancing at herself in the glass and giving a twitch to her cap and her cherry ribbons, left her shrimps and followed him.

It was not that they expected the coach to bring them visitors. Passengers from London and elsewhere were generally bound to Stilborough. But they as regularly went to the door to be in readiness, in case any did alight; to see it pass, and to exchange salutations with the coachman and guard.

It was an event in the Dolphin's somewhat monotonous daily existence.

"I do believe, wife, it's going to stop!" cried John.

It was doing so already. The four horses were drawing up; the guard was descending. He opened the door to let out a gentleman, and took a portmanteau from the boot. Before John Bent, naturally slow in movement, had well bestirred himself, the gentleman, who seemed remarkably quick and active, had put some money into the guard's hand and caught up his portmanteau.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said John, taking it from him. "You are welcome, sir: will you please to enter?"

The stranger was on the point of stepping indoors, when he halted and looked up at the sign-board—where the dolphin, in all the hues of the rainbow, was lashing up spouts of imaginary water with its tail. Smiling to himself, almost as though the dolphin were an old acquaintance, he went in. Mrs. Bent curtsied low to him in the good old respectful fashion, and he returned it with a bow.

A fire was blazing in one of the parlours, and to this room the guest was conducted by both landlord and landlady. Taking off his upper coat, which was warmly lined with dark fur, they saw a slight, active man of some eight-and-twenty years, under middle height, with a fresh, pleasant, handsome face, and bright dark eyes. Something in the face seemed to strike on a chord of the landlord's memory.

"Who the dickens is he like?" mentally questioned John. "Any way, I like his looks."

"I can have a bedroom, I suppose?" spoke the stranger; and they noticed that his English, though fluent, had a foreign ring in it. "Will you show me to one?"

"At your service, sir; please step this way," said Mrs. Bent, in her most gracious tones, for she was habitually courteous to her guests, and was besides favourably impressed by this one's looks and manner. "Hot water directly, Molly," she called in the direction of the kitchen; "and, John, do you bring up the gentleman's luggage."

"I can't think who his face puts me in mind of," began John, when he and his wife got back to their room again, and she began to make hasty work of the shrimps.

"Don't bother about his face," spoke Mrs. Bent. "The face is nice enough, if you mean that. It's late to get anything of a dinner ready; and he has not said what he'll have, though I asked him."

"And look here, wife—that portmanteau is not an English one."

"It may be Dutch, for all it matters to us. Now, John Bent, just you stir up that fire a bit, and put some coal on. I may have to bring a saucepan in here, for what I know."

She had gone away with her shrimps when the stranger came down. He walked straight into the room, and looked from the open door. The landlord stood up.

"You are Thomas Bent, I think," said the stranger, turning round.

"John Bent, sir. My father was Thomas Bent, and he has been dead this many a year."

"And this is your good wife?" he added, as the landlady came bustling in. "Mistress of the inn."

"And master too," muttered John, in an undertone.

"I was about to order dinner, Mr. Bent—— "

"Then you'd better order it of me, sir," put in the landlady. "His head's no better than a sieve if it has much to carry."

"Then I cannot do better than leave my dinner to you," said the young man, with a pleasant laugh. "I should like some fish out of that glorious sea; and the rest as you please. Can I have an English plum-pudding?"

"An English plum-pudding! Good gracious, sir, it could never be made and boiled in double the time!"

"That will do for to-morrow, then."

Mrs. Bent departed, calling Molly as she went. The inn kept only two servants; Molly, and a man; the latter chiefly attending to out-of-door matters. When further help was needed indoors, it could be had from the village.

"This must be a healthy spot," remarked the stranger, taking a chair without ceremony at John Bent's fire. "It is very open and bracing."

"Uncommon healthy, sir. A bit bleak in winter, when the wind's in the east; as it is to-day."

"Have you many good families residing about?"

"Only one, sir. The Castlemaines."

"The Castlemaines?"

"An old family who have lived here for many a year. You'd pass their place, sir, not long before getting out here; a grey house on your left. It is called Greylands' Rest."

"I have heard of Greylands' Rest—and also of the Castlemaines. It belonged, I think, to old Anthony Castlemaine."

"It did, sir. His son has it now."

"I fancied he had more than one son."

"He had three, sir. The eldest, Mr. Basil, went abroad and never was heard of after: leastways, nothing direct. The second, Mr. James, has Greylands' Rest. He always lived there with his father, and he lives there still—master of all since the old gentleman died."

"How did it come to him?" asked the stranger, hastily. "By will?"

"Ah, sir, that no soul can tell. All sorts of surmises went about; but nobody knows how it was."

A pause. "And the third son? Where is he?"

"The third's Mr. Peter. He is a banker at Stilborough."

"Is he rich?"

John Bent laughed. "Rich, sir? Why, it's said he could almost buy up the county. He has one daughter; a beautiful young lady, going to be married to young Mr. Blake-Gordon, a son of Sir Richard. Many thought that Mr. Castlemaine—the present Master of Greylands—would have liked her for his own son. But——"

In rushed Mrs. Bent, a huge cooking apron over her gown. She looked slightly surprised at seeing the stranger seated there; but said nothing. Unlocking the corner cupboard, and throwing wide its doors, she began searching for something on the shelves.

"Here you are, Mrs. Bent! Busy as usual."

The salutation came from a gentleman who had entered the house hastily. A tall, well-made, handsome young fellow, with a frank expression in his dark brown eyes. He stood just within the door, and did not observe the stranger.

"Is it you, Mr. Harry?" she said, glancing round.

"It's no one else," he answered. "What an array of jam-pots! Do you leave the key in the door? A few of those might be walked off and never missed."

"I should like to see anybody attempt it," cried Mrs. Bent, wrathfully. "You are always joking, Mr. Harry."

He laughed merrily. "John," he said, turning to the landlord, "did the coach bring me a parcel?"

"No, sir. Were you expecting one?"

Mrs. Bent turned quite round from her cupboard. "It's not a trick you are thinking to play us, sir? *I* have not forgotten that other parcel you had left here once."

"Other parcel? Oh, that was ever so many years ago. I am expecting this from London, John, if you will take it in. It will come to-morrow, I suppose. Mrs. Bent thinks I am a boy still."

"Ah no, sir, that I don't," she said. "You've long grown beyond that, and out of my control."

"Out of every one else's too," he laughed. "Where I used to get cuffs I now get kisses, Mrs. Bent. And I am not sure but they are the more dangerous application of the two."

"*I* am very sure they are," cried Mrs. Bent, as the young man went off laughing, after bowing slightly to the stranger, who was now standing up, and whose appearance bespoke him a gentleman.

"Who was that?" asked the stranger of John Bent.

"That was Mr. Harry Castlemaine, sir. Son of the Master of Greylands."

In a moment, the stranger was outside the door, gazing after him. But Harry Castlemaine, quick and active, was already almost out of sight. When the stranger came back to his place, Mrs. Bent had locked up her cupboard and departed.

"A fine young man," he remarked.

"And good-hearted as ever lived—though he is a bit random," said John. "I like Mr. Harry: I don't like his father."

"Why not?"

"Well, sir, I hardly know why. One is apt to take dislikes sometimes."

"You were speaking of Greylands' Rest—of the rumours that went abroad respecting it when old Mr. Castlemaine died. What were they?"

"Various rumours, sir; but all tending to one and the same point. And that was, whether Greylands' Rest had, or had not, legally come to Mr. James Castlemaine."

"Being the second son," quietly spoke the stranger. "There can be no doubt, I should think, that the rightful heir was the eldest son, Basil."

"And it was known, too, that Basil was his father's favourite; and that the old man during his last years was always looking and longing for his return," spoke John Bent, warming with the subject: "and in short, sir, everybody expected it would be left to Basil. On the other hand, James was at hand, and the old man could leave it to him if he pleased."

"One glance at the will would set all doubt at rest."

"Ay. But it was not known, sir, whether there was a will or not."

"Not known?"

"No, sir. Some said there was a will, and that it left all to Mr. Basil; others said there was no will at all, but that old Anthony Castlemaine made Mr. James a deed of gift of Greylands' Rest. And a great many said, and still say, that old Mr. Castlemaine only handed him over the estate *in trust* for Mr. Basil—or for any sons Mr. Basil might leave after him."

The stranger sat in silence. On his little finger shone a magnificent diamond ring, evidently of great value; he twirled it about unconsciously.

"What is *your* opinion?" he suddenly asked the landlord.

"Mine, sir? Well, I can't help thinking that the whole was left to Mr. Basil, and that if he's alive the place is no more Mr. James's than it is mine. I think it specially for two reasons: one because the old man always said it would be Basil's; and again, if it was given to Mr. James, whether by will or by deed of gift, he would have taken care to produce his proofs, and so set rumours at rest once for all. Not but what all the Castlemaines are close and proud, never volunteering information about themselves. So that——"

"Now then, John Bent! It's about time you began to lay the cloth and see to the silver."

No need to say from whom came the interruption. Mrs. Bent, her face flushed to the colour of the cherry ribbons, whirled in and whirled out again. John followed. The stranger sat where he was, in a reverie, until called to dinner.

It was a small, but most excellent repast, the wine taken

with it some of the Dolphin's choice Burgundy, of which it had a little bin. John Bent waited on his guest, who dined to his complete satisfaction. He was about to leave the bottle on the table after dinner, but the guest motioned it away.

"No, no more; I do not drink after dinner. It is not our custom in France."

"Oh, very well, sir. I'll cork it up for to-morrow. I—I beg your pardon, sir," resumed the landlord, as he drew the cloth from the table, "what name shall I put down to you, sir?"

The stranger rose and stood on the hearthrug, speaking distinctly when he gave his name.

Speaking distinctly. Nevertheless John Bent seemed not to hear it, for he stared as one in a dream.

"What?" he cried, in startled tones, as he backed against the sideboard, and some of the colour left his face. "*What* name, sir?"

"Anthony Castlemaine."

CHAPTER IV.

FORESHADOWINGS.

The stone walls of Greylands' Rest lay cold and still under the pale February sunshine. The air was sharp and frosty; the sun, though bright, had little warmth in it; and the same cutting east wind that John Bent had complained of the previous afternoon, still blew with equal keenness.

Mr. Castlemaine felt it in his study, where he had been busy all the morning. He fancied he must have caught a chill, for a slight shiver suddenly stirred his tall, fine frame, and he turned to the fire and stirred it vigorously. The fuel was a mixture of wood and coal, and the blaze went roaring up the chimney. The room was not large. Standing with his back to the fire, the window was on his right, the door on his left; opposite, against the wall, stood a massive piece of mahogany furniture, called a bureau. It was a desk made after the fashion of the banker's desk at Stilborough, but larger; the inside fitted up with pigeon-holes and deep drawers, and a slab for writing.

The fittings were well filled with neatly arranged bundles of papers, with account-books belonging to the farm business and other matters, and with a few old letters: and the Master of Greylands was as careful to keep this desk closed and locked from the possibility of interference from those about him as his brother Peter was of his own desk. The Castlemaines were proud, reticent and careful men.

For a great part of the morning Mr. Castlemaine had been busy at this desk. He had shut and locked it now, and was standing with his back to the fire, deep in thought. Two letters of the large size in vogue before envelopes were used, and sealed with the Castlemaine crest, lay on the side-table, ready to be posted. His left hand was inside his waistcoat, resting on the broad plaited frill of fine cambric; his bright dark eyes had rather a troubled look in them as they sought that old building across the fields opposite, the Friar's Keep, and the sparkling sea beyond. In reality, Mr. Castlemaine was looking neither at the Friar's Keep nor the sea, for he was deep in thought and saw nothing without.

The Master of Greylands was of a superstitious nature: it may as well be stated candidly: difficult though it was to believe it of so practical a man. Not to the extent of believing in stories of ghosts and apparitions; the probability is, that in his heart he would have laughed at them; but he did believe in signs and warnings, in omens shadowing forth good and bad luck.

On this self-same morning he awoke with an impression as of some impending evil hanging over him. He could not account for it, for nothing had arisen to trouble him. At the time he did not connect it with any superstitious feeling or fancy, but thought he must be slightly out of sorts. Three or four little hindrances occurred whilst he was dressing. First of all, he could not find his slippers: he hunted about in vain; and then remembered that he had left them the previous night in his study—a most unusual thing for him to have done. Next, in putting on his shirt, he tore the button-hole at the neck, and was obliged to change it for another. Lastly he upset his shaving water, and had to wait whilst a fresh supply was brought to him.

"Nothing but impediments: it seems as though I were not

to get dressed to-day," muttered the Master of Greylands. "Can any ill-luck be in store for me?"

The intelligent reader will doubtless be surprised to hear him ask so ridiculous a question. Nevertheless, the same sort of thing—these repeated hindrances—had occurred twice before in Mr. Castlemaine's life, and each time a great evil had followed in the day. Not of the present time was he now thinking, but of one of those past days, and of what it had brought forth.

"Poor Maria!" he softly cried—alluding to his first wife, of whom he had been passionately fond. "Well and merry in the morning; and at night stretched before me in death. It was an awful accident! and I—I have never cared quite so much for the world since. Maria was—— What is it? Come in."

A knock at the door had disturbed his reflections. A man-servant appeared.

"Commodore Teague wants to know, sir, whether he may get those two or three barrow-loads of wood moved to the Hutt to-day. He would like to, he says, if it's convenient."

"Yes, he can have it done. Is he here, Miles?"

"Yes, sir; waiting in the yard."

"I'll come down and speak to him."

And the Master of Greylands, taking the letters from the side-table, left the room to descend, closing the door behind him.

We must turn for a few minutes to the Dolphin Inn, and the previous evening. Nothing could well have exceeded John Bent's consternation when his guest, the unknown stranger, had disclosed his name. Anthony Castlemaine! Not quite at first, but after a short interval, the landlord saw how it must be—he was the son of the late Basil Castlemaine. And in the moment's annoyance he was not very pleased to hear it.

"You ought to have told me, sir," he stammered in confusion. "It was unkind to take me at a disadvantage. Here have I been using liberties with the family's name, supposing I was talking to a stranger!"

The frank expression of the young man's face, the pleasant look in his fine brown eyes, reassured the landlord, even more than words.

"You have not said a syllable of my family that I could take exception to," he freely replied. "You knew my father: will you shake hands with me, John Bent, as my father's son?"

"You are too good, sir; and I meant no harm by my gossip," said the landlord, meeting the offered hand. "You must be the son of Mr. Basil. It's a great many years since he went away, and I was only a youngster, but I remember him. Your face is very much the same as his was, sir. The likeness was puzzling me beyond everything. I hope Mr. Basil is well, sir."

"No," said the young man, "he is dead. And I have come over here, as his son and heir, to claim Greylands' Rest."

It was even so. The facts were as young Anthony Castlemaine stated. And a short summary of past events must be given here.

When Basil Castlemaine went abroad so many years ago, in his hot-blooded youth, he spent some of the first years roaming about: seeing the world, he called it. Later on, circumstances made him acquainted with a young English lady, whose friends lived in the Dauphiné: which, as the world knows, borders on Italy. They had settled near a place called Gap, and were in commerce there, owning extensive silk-mills. Basil Castlemaine, tired probably of his wandering life, and of being a beau garçon, married this young lady, put all the money he had left (a tolerably good sum) into the silk-mills, and became a partner. There he had remained. He liked the climate; liked the French mode of living; liked the business he had engaged in. Not once had he revisited England. He was by nature a most obstinate man, retaining anger for ever, and he would not give token of remembrance to the father and brothers who, in his opinion, had been too glad to get rid of him. No doubt they had been. But, though he did not allow them to hear of him, he heard occasionally of them. An old acquaintance of his, the son of one Squire Dobie, living a few miles the other side Stilborough, wrote to him every two years, or so, and gave him the news of the neighbourhood. But this correspondence (if letters written only on one side could be called so, for all Tom Dobie ever received in return was a newspaper, sent in token that his letter had reached its destination) was carried on in secret; and Tom Dobie never disclosed it to mortal man, having undertaken not to do so. About two years before the present period, Tom

Dobie had died: his letters of course ceased, and it was by the merest accident that Basil Castlemaine heard of the death of his father. He was then himself too ill to return and put in his claim to Greylands' Rest; in fact, he was near to death; but he charged his son to go to England and claim the estate as soon as he should be no more; nay, as he said, to enter into possession of it. But he made use of a peculiar warning in giving this charge to his son; and these were the words:

"Take care what you are about, Anthony, and go cautiously to work. There may be treachery in store for you. The brothers—your uncles—who combined to drive me from our homestead in days gone by, may combine again to keep you out of it. Take care of yourself, I say; feel your way; and beware of treachery."

Whether, as is sometimes supposed to be the case, the dying man had some prevision of the future, and saw, as by intuition, what that future would bring forth, certain it was, that he gave this warning to young Anthony. It was equally certain that the end justified the caution.

So here was Anthony Castlemaine: arrived in the land of his family to claim what he deemed was his lawful inheritance, Greylands' Rest, the deep black band worn for his father still new upon his hat.

Mrs. Castlemaine sat in the red room, reading a letter. Or rather, re-reading it, for it was one that had arrived earlier in the morning. A lady at Stilborough had applied for the vacant place of governess to Miss Flora Castlemaine, and had enclosed her testimonials.

"Good music, singing, drawing; no French," read Mrs. Castlemaine aloud, partly for the benefit of Miss Flora, who stood on a stool at her elbow, not at all pleased that such an application should arrive; for, as we have already seen, the young lady would have preferred to bring herself up without the aid of any governess. "Good-tempered, but an excellent disciplinarian; very firm with her pupils——"

"I'm not going to have *her*, mamma," came the interruption, "Don't you think it!"

"I do not suppose you will have her, Flora. The want of French will be a fatal objection. How tiresome it is! One seems unable to get everything. The last lady who applied

was not a sufficient musician for advanced pupils, and therefore could not have undertaken Ethel's music."

"As if Ethel needed to learn music still! Why, she plays as well—as possible," concluded the girl, at a loss for a comparison. "Catch me learning music when I'm as old as Ethel!"

"I consider it nonsense myself, but Ethel wishes it, and your papa so foolishly gives in to her whims in all things that of course she has to be studied in the matter as much as you. It may be months and months before we find a lady who combines all that's wanted *here*."

Mrs. Castlemaine spoke resentfully. What with one thing and another, she generally was in a state of resentment against Ethel.

"I hope it may be years and years!" cried Flora, leaning her arms on the table and kicking her feet about. "I hope we shall never get one at all."

"It would be easy enough to find one, but for this trouble about Ethel's music," grumbled Mrs. Castlemaine. "I have a great mind to send her to the Grey Nunnery for her lessons. Sister Charlotte, I know, is perfect on the piano; and she would be glad of the employment."

"Papa would not let her go to the Nunnery," said the sharp girl. "He does not like the Grey Ladies."

"I suppose he wouldn't. I'm sure, what with this and that disqualification, a good governess is as difficult to find as—— Get off the table, my sweet child," hastily broke off Mrs. Castlemaine: "here comes your papa."

The Master of Greylands entered the red room, after his short interview with Commodore Teague. Miss Flora slipped past him, and disappeared. He saw a good deal to find fault with in her rude, tomboy ways; and she avoided him when she could. Taking the paper, he stirred the fire into a blaze, just as he had, not many minutes before, stirred his own fire upstairs.

"It is a bitterly cold day," he observed. "I think I must have caught a chill, for I seem to feel cold in an unusual degree. What's that?"

Mrs. Castlemaine still held the letter in her hand; and by the expression of her countenance, bent upon the contents, he could perceive they contained some annoyance.

"*This* governess does not do; it is as bad as the last. She

wanted music; this one wants French. Is it not provoking, James?"

Mr. Castlemaine took up the letters and read them.

"I should say she is just the sort of governess for Flora," he observed. "The testimonials are excellent."

"But her want of French! Did you not observe that?"

"I don't know that French is of so much consequence for Flora as having a suitable person to control her. One who will keep her under firm discipline. As it is, she is being ruined."

"French not of consequence!" repeated Mrs. Castlemaine. "What can you mean, James?"

"I said it was not of so much consequence, comparatively speaking. Neither is it."

"Whilst Ethel's French is perfect!"

"What has that to do with it?"

"I will never submit to seeing Flora inferior in accomplishments to Ethel, James. French I hold especially by: I have felt the want of it myself. Better, of the two, to fail in music than in speaking French. If it were not for Ethel's senseless whim of continuing to take music lessons, there would be no trouble."

"Who's this, I wonder?" cried Mr. Castlemaine.

He alluded to a ring at the hall-bell. Flora came dashing in.

"It's a gentleman in a fur coat," she said. "I watched him come up the avenue."

"A gentleman in a fur coat!" repeated her mother. "Some one who has walked from Stilborough this cold day, I suppose."

Miles entered. On the small silver waiter lay a card. He presented it to his master and spoke. "The gentleman wishes to see you, sir. I have shown him into the drawing-room."

The Master of Greylands was gazing at the card with knitted brow and haughty lips. He did not understand the name on it.

"What farce is this?" he exclaimed, tossing the card on the table in anger. And Mrs. Castlemaine bent towards it with aroused curiosity.

"*Anthony Castlemaine.*"

"It must be an old card of your father's, James," she remarked; "given, most likely, years ago, to some one who might need to present himself here—perhaps to ask a favour."

This view, just at the moment, seemed feasible enough to Mr.

Castlemaine, and his brow lost its anger. Another instant, and he saw how untenable it was.

"My father never had such a card as this, Sophia; never called himself plain 'Anthony Castlemaine.' And look at the flourishes—it's more like a foreign than an English card. What sort of a person is it, Miles?"

"A youngish gentleman, sir: has a lot of dark fur on his coat. He asked for Mr. James Castlemaine."

"Mr. *James* Castlemaine!" echoed the Master of Greylands, sharply, as he stalked from the room, card in hand.

The visitor was standing before a portrait in the drawing-room, gazing at it earnestly. It was that of old Anthony Castlemaine, taken when he was about fifty years of age. At the opening of the door he turned and advanced, his hand extended and a pleasant smile on his face.

"I have the pleasure, I fancy, of seeing my uncle James!"

Mr. Castlemaine kept his hands to himself. He looked haughtily at the intruder, and spoke frigidly.

"I have not the honour of your acquaintance, sir."

"But my card tells you who I am," rejoined the young man. "I am indeed your nephew; the son of your elder brother. He was Basil, and you are James."

"Pardon me, sir, if I tell you what *I* think you are. An impostor."

"Ah no. I am in truth your nephew, Anthony Castlemaine. I have legal documents with me to prove the fact; I bring you also a letter from my father, written on his death-bed. But I should have thought you might know me by my likeness to my father; and he—— I could fancy that portrait had been taken for him"—pointing to the one he had been looking at. "He always said I greatly resembled my grandfather."

There could be no disputing the likeness. The young man's face was the Castlemaine face exactly: the well-formed, handsome features, the clear, fresh complexion, the brilliant dark eyes. All the Castlemaines had been alike, and this one was like them all; even like James, who stood there.

Taking a letter from his pocket-book, he handed it to Mr. Castlemaine. The latter broke the seal—Basil's own seal; he saw that—and began to read it. Whilst he did so, he reflected a little, and made up his mind.

He decided to acknowledge his nephew. For he had the sense to see that no other resource would be left him. He did it with a tolerably good grace, but in a reserved, cold manner. Folding the letter, he asked a few questions which young Anthony freely answered, and gave a brief account of the past.

"And Basil—your father—is dead, you say! Has been dead four weeks. This letter, I see, is dated Christmas-Day."

"It was on Christmas-Day that he wrote it. Yes, nearly four weeks have elapsed since his death: it took place on the fourteenth of January; his wife, my dear mother, had died on the same day six years before. That was curious, was it not? I had meant to come over here immediately, as he charged me; but there were many matters of business to be settled, and I could not leave until now."

"Have you come over for any particular purpose?" coldly asked Mr. Castlemaine.

"I have come to remain, Uncle James. To take possession of my inheritance."

"Of your inheritance?"

"The estate of Greylands' Rest."

"Greylands' Rest is not yours," said Mr. Castlemaine.

"My father informed me that it was mine. He brought me up to no profession: he always said that Greylands' Rest would be mine at his death; that he should come into it himself at the death of his father, and it would descend to me. To make all sure, he left it to me by will. And, as I have told you, we did not hear of my grandfather's death until close upon last Christmas. Had my father known it in the summer, he would have come over himself to put in his claim: he was then in sufficiently good health to do so."

"It is a pity you should have come so far on a fruitless errand, sir. Listen to me. When your father abandoned his home in his youth, he forfeited all claim to the inheritance. He asked for his portion, and received it; he took it away with him and *remained* away; remained away for nearly forty years. What claim does he suppose that sort of conduct gave him on my father's affection, that he should leave him Greylands' Rest?"

"He always said his father would leave it to no one else: he knew it and was sure of it."

"What my father might have done had Basil returned during his lifetime, I cannot pretend to say: neither is it of any consequence to surmise now. Basil did not return, and, therefore, you cannot be surprised that he lost Greylands' Rest; that the old father left it to his second son—myself—instead of to him."

"But did he leave it to you, sir?"

"A superfluous question, young man. I succeeded to it, and am in possession of it."

"I am told that there are doubts upon the point," returned Anthony, speaking in the same pleasant tone, but with straightforward candour.

"Doubts upon what point?" haughtily demanded Mr. Castlemaine.

"What I hear is this, Uncle James. That it is not known to the world, and never has been known, how you came into Greylands' Rest. Whether the estate was left to you by will, or handed over to you by deed of gift, or given to you *in trust* to hold for my father. No one knows, I am told, anything about it, or even whether there was or was not a will. Perhaps you will give me these particulars?"

Mr. Castlemaine's face grew dark as night. "Do you presume to doubt my word? I tell you that Greylands' Rest is mine. Let it content you."

"If you will prove to me that Greylands' Rest is yours, Uncle James, I will never say another word upon the subject, or give you the slightest trouble. Prove this, and I will remain a few days in the neighbourhood, for the sake of establishing family ties—though I may never meet any of you again—and then return to the place whence I came. But if you do not give me this proof, I must prosecute my claim, and maintain my rights."

"Rights!" scoffed Mr. Castlemaine, beginning to lose his temper. "How dare you presume to talk to *me* in this way? A needy adventurer—for that is what I conclude you to be—left without means of your own—to come here, and——"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted the young man; "I am not needy. Though far from rich, I have a fair and sufficient competency. Quite sufficient to keep me in comfort."

"It is all one to me," said Mr. Castlemaine. "You had better do as you say—return to the place whence you came."

"If the estate be truly and lawfully yours, I should be the last to attempt to disturb you in it; I should not wish to do so. But if it be not yours, sir, it must be mine; and, until I can be assured one way or the other, I shall remain here, though it be for ever."

Mr. Castlemaine drew himself up to his full height. He was perfectly calm again; perhaps somewhat vexed that he had allowed himself to betray temper; and rejoined, coolly and prudently, "I cannot pretend to control your movements; to say you shall go, or you shall not go; but I tell you, frankly, that your remaining will not serve you. Were you to remain for ever—as you phrase it—not one tittle of proof would you receive from me. Things have come to a pretty pass if I am to be bearded in my own house, and have my word doubted."

"Well, Uncle James," said the young man, still speaking pleasantly, "then nothing remains for me but to try and find out the truth for myself. I wish you had been more open with me, for I am sure I do not know how to set about it," he added, candidly.

A faint, proud smile curled Mr. Castlemaine's decisive lips. It seemed to say, "Do what you please; it is beneath my notice." His nephew took up his hat to depart.

"May I offer to shake hands with you, Uncle James? I hope we need not be enemies?"

A moment's hesitation, and Mr. Castlemaine met the offered hand. It was next to impossible to resist this frank geniality; just the same geniality that had characterized Basil; and Mr. Castlemaine thawed a little.

"It appears to be a very strange thing that Basil should have remained stationary all those years in France; never once to have come home to us!"

"I have heard him say many a time that he would never return until he returned to take possession of Greylands' Rest. And during the time of the great war travelling was dangerous and difficult."

"Neither could I have believed that he would have settled down so quietly. And to engage in commerce!"

"He grew to like its bustle. He had a great capacity for business, Uncle James."

"No doubt; being a Castlemaine," was the answer, delivered with conscious superiority. "The Castlemaines lack capacity for nothing they choose to undertake. Good-morning; and I wish you a better errand."

As Anthony Castlemaine, on departing, neared the gate leading to the avenue, he saw a young lady approaching it. A fisherman, to whom she was speaking, walked by her side. The words of the latter, as he turned away, caught his ear.

"You will please tell the master then, Miss Castlemaine, and say a good word to him for me?"

"Yes, Gleeson; and I am sorry for your misfortune," the young lady answered. "Good-day."

Anthony gazed with unfeigned pleasure on the beautiful face presented to him in—as he supposed—his cousin. It was Ethel Reene. The cheeks had acquired a soft rose blush in the crisp air, the dark brown hair a wonderfully bright tinge in the sunshine; and in the deep eyes glancing so honestly through their long lashes into those of the stranger, there was a candour that caused Anthony Castlemaine to think them the prettiest eyes he had ever seen. He advanced and said a few words indicative of his pleasure at meeting her. Ethel was lost in astonishment.

"My cousin, Miss Castlemaine?"

"No, I am not Miss Castlemaine," returned Ethel.

"I—pardon me!—I assuredly heard the sailor address you as Miss Castlemaine."

"I am often called so," she condescended to explain. "Mr. Castlemaine's house is my home, and people sometimes call me by the name. But—and if I were Miss Castlemaine, who are you, sir, that you should claim to be my cousin? The Castlemaines have no strange cousins."

"I am Anthony Castlemaine; son of the late Basil Castlemaine, the heir of Greylands. I have now come from an interview with my uncle James."

"Anthony Castlemaine, the son of Basil Castlemaine!" she exclaimed, in astonishment; a conviction, nevertheless, seizing her that it was true. "The son of the lost Basil!"

"I am, in truth, his son," replied Anthony. "My father is dead, and I have come over to claim—and I hope, enter into—my patrimony, Greylands' Rest."

CHAPTER V.

RAVEN'S PRIORY.

LIGHTS gleamed from the rooms of the banker's house in Stilborough. Mr. Peter Castlemaine and Miss Castlemaine gave a dance that night; and it was the custom to open the door early, and keep it open, for the arrival of the expected guests.

The reception-rooms were ready, and gay with wax-lights and flowers. The largest was appropriated to dancing, and the floor was chalked artistically, after the fashion of the day.

In the small apartment that was her own sitting-room stood Mary Ursula. In her rich robes of white silk and lace, in the jewels which had been her mother's, and which it was her father's wish she should wear on state occasions, she looked, with her noble form and most lovely face, of regal beauty. Excitement had flushed her cheeks; on her delicate and perfect features sat an animation not often seen there. Whatever evil might be hanging over the house, at least no prevision of it rested on Miss Castlemaine; and perhaps few young ladies in the kingdom could be found possessed of the requisites for happiness in a degree that could vie with the banker's daughter. Beautiful, amiable, clever, wealthy; the darling of her father; sheltered from every care in her sumptuous home; loving and beloved by a young man worthy of her, and to whom she was soon to be united! In the days to come, Mary Ursula would look back on this time, and tell herself that its very intensity might have warned her that it was too bright to last.

He, her lover, was by her side now. He had come early, purposely to be for a few minutes alone with her, before the arrival of other guests. They stood together on the hearthrug. A quiet-looking young man of middle height, with dark hair, just the shade of hers, and rather a sad cast of face: a face, however, that did not seem to proclaim great moral strength. Such was William Blake-Gordon.

They were conversing of the future; the future that to both looked so bright; of the home and the life that ere long would be theirs in common. Mr. Blake-Gordon had for some little

time been searching for a house, and had not met with a suitable one. But he thought he had found it now.

"It seems to me to be just the thing, Mary," he was saying —for he never called her by her second name. "Only four miles from Stilborough on the Loughton Road; within an easy distance of your father's home and of Sir Richard's. It was by the merest chance I heard this morning that the Wests were leaving; and we can secure it at once if we will, before it goes into the market."

Miss Castlemaine knew the house by sight; she had passed it many a time in her drives, and seen it nestling amongst the trees. It was called by a somewhat fanciful name—Raven's Priory.

"It is not to be let, you say, William?"

"Only to be bought. There will be, I presume, no difficulty made to that by the authorities."

He spoke with a smile. She smiled too. With the loads of wealth that would be theirs, they might well laugh at the idea of difficulty.

"Only that—that it is uncertain how long we may require to live in it," she said, with a slight hesitation. "I suppose that —some time——"

"We shall have to leave it for my father's home. True. But that, I trust, may be far off. And then we could sell Raven's Priory."

"Yes, of course. It is a nice place, William?"

"Charming," he replied with enthusiasm. For, of course, all things, the proposed residence included, wore to him the hue of couleur-de-rose.

"I have never been inside it," she observed.

"No. The Wests are churlish people. Report says that Mrs. West is a hypochondriac. They allowed me to go over the house this morning. It is the nicest place possible—and not too large or too small for us. You will be charmed with the drawing-rooms, Mary; and the conservatory is one of the prettiest I ever saw. I wonder what your father will think about it? We might tell him about it now. Where is he?"

"He is out," she answered. "Just as he was going up to dress, Hill sent for him, and they went out together. Papa ran

up to tell me he would be back as soon as possible, but that I must for once receive the people alone."

"I wish I might stand by your side to help to receive them!" he said impulsively. "Do you think Mrs. Webb would faint, if she were here?" he continued, with a smile. "Ah, well—a short time, my darling, and I shall have the right to stand by you for ever."

He stole his arm round her waist, and whispered a repetition of those love vows that had so often before charmed her ear and thrilled her heart. He recounted to her all the features he remembered of the house that neither of them doubted would be their future home; and the moments passed in bliss unutterable.

The sound of carriages drawing up warned them that this sweet pastime was at an end. Commotion in the hall succeeded to it: the servants were receiving the first guests.

"Oh, William—I forgot—I meant to tell you," she hurriedly whispered. "I had the most wretched dream last night. And you know I very rarely dream. I have not been able to get it out of my mind all day."

"What is it, Mary?"

"I thought we were separated, you and I; separated for ever. We had quarrelled, I think, but that point was not clear; and you turned off one way, I another. It was in the gallery of this house, and we had been talking together. You went out at the other end, by the door near the dining-room, and I at this end; and we turned at the last and looked at one another. Oh, the look was dreadful! I shall never forget its pain and sadness! And we both of us knew that it was the last farewell look; that we should never again meet in this world."

"My love!" he murmured, bending his face to hers. "How could you let it trouble you?—knowing it was only a dream! Nothing but the decree of God—death—shall ever separate us, Mary. Be it for weal or woe, we will go through life together."

He kissed away the tears that had gathered at the remembrance; and Miss Castlemaine turned hastily into one of the larger rooms, and took up her place there in expectation. For the feet of the gay world were already traversing the gallery.

She welcomed her guests, soon crowding in, with the gracious manner, the repose that always characterized her, apologizing to all for the absence of her father; saying that he had been called out unexpectedly, but would soon return. Amongst others, came the party from Greylands' Rest, arriving rather late: Mrs. Castlemaine in black velvet, leaning on the arm of her step-son; Ethel Reene, in a simple dress of white net, adorned with white ribbons. There was many a fine young man present, but never a finer or more attractive than Harry Castlemaine.

"Is it of any use to ask whether you are at liberty to honour me with your hand for the first dance, Mary Ursula?" he inquired, after conducting Mrs. Castlemaine to a sofa.

"Not the least," answered Miss Castlemaine, smiling. "I am engaged for that, and for the second also."

"Of course. Well, it is all as it should be, I suppose. No one has so good a right as Mr. Blake-Gordon to open the ball with you."

"You will find many a substitute, Harry. See all those young ladies around; every one of them is hoping that you may choose her."

He laughed consciously: perfectly well aware of the general favour accorded by the ladies, young and old, to Harry Castlemaine. But this time, at any rate, he intended to disappoint them all. He turned to Miss Reene.

"Will you take compassion upon a rejected man, Ethel? Mary Ursula won't give me the first two dances, you hear; so I appeal to you in all humility. Don't refuse me."

"Nonsense, Harry!" was the young lady's answer. "You must not ask *me* for the first dance; it would be like brother and sister dancing together; all the room would resent it. Choose elsewhere. Miss Mountsorrel across there will not say you nay."

"No; but she won't condescend to speak three words to me," returned Mr. Harry Castlemaine. "If you do not dance them with me, Ethel, I shall sit down until the two first dances are over."

He spoke still in the same laughing manner; nevertheless, there was a ring of decision in the tone of the last words; and Ethel knew he meant what he said.

"If you make so great a point of it, I will dance with you," she observed. "But I must again say that you ought to take any one rather than me."

"I have not seen my uncle yet," remarked Miss Castlemaine to Ethel, as Harry strolled away to pay his devotions to the room generally. "Where can he be lingering?"

"Papa is not here," replied Ethel.

"Not here! How is that?"

"Really I don't know. When Harry came out to the carriage to-night—we had been sitting in it quite five minutes waiting for him; but he had been away all day, and was late in dressing. Mrs. Castlemaine announced that papa was not coming with us."

"I suppose he will come in later," remarked Mary Ursula, as she moved away to receive some fresh guests.

The ball opened with a country dance. Miss Castlemaine and her lover, Mr. Blake-Gordon, took their places at its head; Harry Castlemaine and Miss Reene were next to them. For in those days, people stood very much upon etiquette at these assemblies, and the ladies of the family took precedence of all others in the opening dance.

That chosen was called the Triumph. Harry Castlemaine led Mary Ursula down between the line of admiring spectators; her partner, Mr. Blake-Gordon, followed, and they brought the young lady back in triumph. Such was the commencement of the figure. It was a thing to be remembered in after-years; the singularly good looks of at least two out of the three; Harry, the sole male heir of the Castlemaines, with the tall fine form and the handsome face; and Mary Ursula, stately and beautiful. Ethel Reene was standing alone, in her quiet loveliness, looking like a snowdrop, waiting until her turn should come to be in like manner taken down. The faces of all sparkled with animation and happiness; the gala robes of the two young ladies added to the charm of the scene. Many recalled it later; recalled it in sorrow: for, of those four, ere a year had gone by, one was not, and another's life had been blighted. No prevision, however, rested on any this night of what the future held in store for them; and they revelled in the moment's enjoyment, gay at heart. Heaven is too merciful to let Fate cast its shadow on us before the time.

The banker came in ere the first dance was over. Moving about from room to room amongst his guests, glancing with approving smile at the dancers, seeing that the card-tables were filled, he at length approached Mrs. Castlemaine. She happened to be alone just then, and he sat down beside her.

"I don't see James anywhere," he remarked. "Where is he hiding himself?"

"He has not come," replied Mrs. Castlemaine.

"No! How's that? James enjoys a ball."

"Yes, I think he does still, almost as much as his son Harry."

"Then what has kept him away?"

"I really do not know. When I was all but ready myself, finding James had not begun to dress, I sent Harriet to remind him of the lateness of the hour, and she brought word back that her master was not going."

"Did he say why?" asked Mr. Peter Castlemaine.

"No! I knocked at his study-door afterwards, and found him seated at his bureau. He seemed busy. All he said was, that he should remain at home. You know, Peter, James rarely troubles himself to give reasons for what he does."

"Well, I am sorry. We may not have many more of these social meetings."

"I suppose not," said Mrs. Castlemaine, assuming that her brother-in-law alluded indirectly to his daughter's approaching marriage. "When once you have lost Mary Ursula, these festivities will no longer be needed."

"No," said the banker, absently.

"I suppose it will be very soon now."

"What will be soon?"

"The wedding. James thinks it will be after Easter."

"Oh—the wedding," spoke Mr. Peter Castlemaine, with the air of a man preoccupied. "I don't know: we shall see: no time has yet been decided."

"Close as his brother," thought Mrs. Castlemaine. "No chance that he will disclose anything unless he chooses."

"Will James be coming in to Stilborough to-morrow?" asked the banker.

"I'm sure I cannot tell. He goes out and comes in, you know, without any reference to me. I fancy he may *not* come

in, unless he has some special errand. He has not seemed well to-day, and thinks he has caught cold."

"Ah, then I dare say that's the secret of his staying at home to-night," said Mr. Peter Castlemaine.

"Yes, it may be so. That did not occur to me. He has also been very much annoyed to-day: and you know, Peter, if once James is thoroughly put out of temper, it takes some little time to bring him round again."

The banker nodded.

"What has annoyed him?"

"A very curious thing," replied Mrs. Castlemaine: "you will hardly believe it when I tell you. Some young man——"

She glanced round to make sure that no one was within hearing. Then moving nearer to the banker, went on in a lowered voice:

"Some young man presented himself this morning at Greylands' Rest, pretending to want to put in a claim to the estate."

Abstracted though the banker had been throughout the brief interview, these words aroused him to the quick. In one moment he was the calm, shrewd man of business, his head erect, his keen eyes observant.

"I do not understand you, Mrs. Castlemaine."

"Neither do I understand," she rejoined. "James said just a word or two to me, and I gathered the rest."

"Who was the young man?"

"Flora described him as wearing a coat trimmed with fur; and Miles thought he spoke with a foreign accent," replied Mrs. Castlemaine, deviating unconsciously from the question.

"But don't you know who he was? Did he give no account of himself?"

"He calls himself Anthony Castlemaine."

As the name left her lips a curious change, as though he were startled, passed momentarily over the banker's countenance. But he neither stirred nor spoke.

"When the card was brought in with that name upon it—James happened to be in the red room, talking to me about a new governess—I said it must be an old card of your father's, but it proved not to be so. What he wants to make out is, that he is the son of Basil Castlemaine."

"Did James see him?"

"Oh yes, and their interview lasted more than an hour."

"And he told James he was Basil's son—this young man?"

"I think so. At any rate, the young man told Ethel he was so. She happened to meet him as he was leaving the house, and he introduced himself to her as Anthony Castlemaine, Basil's son, and said he had come over to claim his inheritance —Greylands' Rest."

"And where's Basil?" asked the banker, after a pause.

"Dead."

"Dead?"

"So the young man wishes it to appear. My opinion is he must be some impostor."

"An impostor, no doubt," assented the banker, slowly. "At least—he may be so. I only wonder that we have not, under the circumstances, had people here before, claiming to be connected with Basil."

"And I am sure the matter has annoyed James very much," pursued Mrs. Castlemaine. "He betrayed it in his manner, and was not at all like himself all the afternoon. I should make short work of it if the man came again, were I James, and threaten him with the law."

Mr. Peter Castlemaine said no more, and presently rose to join his guests. But as he talked to one, laughed with another, listened to a third, his head bent in attention, none had an idea that these signs of interest were assumed, and that his mind was far away.

He had sufficient trouble of his own just then, as Heaven knew; very much of it on this particular evening; but this other trouble, that appeared to be arising for his brother James, added to it. To Mrs. Castlemaine's scornfully expressed opinion that the man was an impostor, he had assented just in the same way that he was now talking with his guests—mechanically. For some instinct, or prevision, call it what you will, lay on the banker's heart, that the man would turn out to be no impostor, but the veritable son of Basil the exile.

Peter Castlemaine was much attached to his brother James, and for James's own sake he would have regretted that any annoyance or trouble should arise for him; but he had also a selfish motive for regretting it. In his dire strait as to money —for to that it had now come—he had been rapidly making

up his mind that evening to appeal to James to let him have some. The appeal might not be successful under the most favourable auspices: he knew that: but with this trouble looming upon the Master of Greylands, he foresaw that it must and would fail. Greylands' Rest might be James's in all security; but an impression had lain on the mind of Peter Castlemaine, since his father's death, that if Basil ever returned he would set up a claim to it.

Supper over—the elaborate supper of those days—and the two dances following it, most of the guests departed. Mr. Blake-Gordon, searching for the banker to wish him good-night, at length found him standing over the fire in the deserted card-room. Absorbed though he was in his own happiness, the young man could but notice the flood-tide of care on the banker's brow. It cleared, as if by magic, when the banker looked up and saw him.

"Is it you, William? I thought you had left."

"I should hardly leave, sir, without wishing you good-night. It has been a delightful evening!"

"Ay, I think you have all enjoyed yourselves. Well, youth is the time for enjoyment," observed the banker. "We can never again find the same zest for it, once youth is past."

"You look tired, sir; otherwise I—I might have ventured to trespass on you for five minutes' conversation, late though it be," pursued Mr. Blake-Gordon, with hesitation.

"Tired!—not at all. You may take five minutes; and ten to that, William."

"It is about our future residence, sir. Raven's Priory is in the market: and I think—and Mary thinks—it will just suit us."

"Ay; I heard more than a week ago that the Wests were leaving."

The words took William Blake-Gordon by surprise. He looked at the banker.

"Did you, sir? And did it not strike you that it would be a suitable place for us?"

"I cannot say that I thought much about it," was the banker's answer, twirling about with his hand as he spoke an ornament on the mantelpiece: a small, costly vase of old Dresden.

"But don't you think it would be the very thing for us, sir?"

"I dare say it might be. The gardens and conservatories have been well kept up; and you and Mary Ursula have both a weakness for flowers."

That was quite true. And the "weakness" showed itself then, for the young man went off into rapturous descriptions of the wealth of Raven's Priory in respect of floriculture. The ten minutes slipped away to twenty; and in his own enthusiasm Mr. Blake-Gordon did not notice the absence of it in his hearer.

"But I must not keep you longer, sir," he suddenly said, as his eyes caught the hands of the clock. "Perhaps you will let me see you about it to-morrow. Or allow my father to see you —that will be better still."

"Not to-morrow," said Mr. Peter Castlemaine. "I shall be particularly engaged all day. Some other time."

"Whenever you please, sir. Only—we must take care that we are not forestalled in the matter. Delay might——"

"We can obtain a promise of the first refusal," interrupted the banker, in somewhat impatient tones. "That will not be difficult."

Mr. Blake-Gordon had not yet said his last farewell to his betrothed wife; and found her in the music-room, seated near the organ. She was waiting for her father.

"We shall have Raven's Priory, Mary," he whispered, speaking out his thoughts hopefully; and his voice was joyous, and his pale face had a glow on it not often seen there. "Your father himself says how beautiful the gardens and conservatories are."

"Yes," she gently answered, "I think we are sure to have it."

He placed her hand within his arm, and they walked together to the end of the music-room. Most of the lights had been put out. Just within the door he halted and took his farewell.

"May all good angels guard you this happy night—my love!—my promised wife!"

He passed down the corridor swiftly; she stole blushingly to the door, to take a last look at him. At that moment a sound, as of some frail thing broken, was heard in the card-room. Mr. Blake-Gordon turned into it; Mary Ursula followed him.

The Dresden vase lay on the hearth, shivered to atoms. It

was one that Mary Ursula greatly valued, for it had been a purchase of her mother's."

"Oh, papa! How did it happen?"

"My dear, I swept it off with my elbow: I am very sorry," said Mr. Peter Castlemaine.

CHAPTER VI.

ANTHONY CASTLEMAINE.

THE dinner-hour with all business men in Stilborough was half-past one o'clock. Perhaps Mr. Peter Castlemaine was the only man who did not really dine then; but he then took his luncheon, which came very much to the same thing. It was the recognized interregnum in the daily work of the town—this half-hour between half-past one and two—and shops, banks, offices, were all virtually though not actually closed. The Castlemaine bank made no exception to the rule. On all days, excepting Thursday, market-day, the bank was left to the care of one clerk during this half-hour. As a rule, not a single customer came in until two o'clock had struck.

It was the day after the ball. The bank had been busy all the morning, and Mr. Peter Castlemaine had been away the best part of it. He came back at half-past one, just as the clerks were filing out.

"Do you want me, sir?" asked Thomas Hill, standing back, hat in hand; and it was the terribly worn look on his master's face that induced him to ask the question.

"Just for a few minutes," was the reply. "Come into my room."

Once there, the door closed upon them, they sat down in grievous tribulation. There was no dinner for poor Thomas Hill that day; no luncheon for his master: the hour's perplexities were all in all to them.

On the previous evening some stranger had arrived at Stilborough, and had put up at the chief inn, the Turk's Head; and then, after inquiring for the private address of Mr. Peter Castlemaine's head-clerk, had betaken himself to the clerk's lodgings. Thomas Hill was seated at tea when the gentleman

was shown in. It proved to be a Mr. Fosbrook, from London: and the moment the clerk heard the name, and realized the fact that its owner stood before him, he turned cold as a stone. For above all men who could bring most danger to Mr. Peter Castlemaine, and whom the banker had most reason to dread, was this very one, Fosbrook. That he had come down to seek explanations which might no longer be avoided, the clerk felt sure: and the fact of his seeking him out instead of his master, proved that he suspected something was more than wrong. He had had a little passing, private acquaintance with Mr. Fosbrook in the years gone by, and perhaps that circumstance had induced the step.

Thomas Hill did what he could. He dared not afford explanation or information himself, for he knew not what it would be safe to say or leave unsaid. He induced Mr. Fosbrook to return to his inn, undertaking to bring his master to him there. To the banker's house he would not take the stranger; for the gaiety of which it was that night the scene was not altogether a pleasant thing to show to a creditor. Leaving Mr. Fosbrook at the Turk's Head on his way, he went on to Mr. Peter Castlemaine's.

Mr. Peter Castlemaine at once went to the inn. He had no resource but to do so: he did not dare do otherwise: and it was this that caused his absence during the arrival of the guests. The interview was not a long one; for the banker, pleading the fact of having friends at home, postponed it until the morning.

It was with this gentleman that his morning had been spent; that he had now, at half-past one, just returned from. Returned with the weary look on his face, and the more than weary pain at his heart.

"And the result, sir?" asked Thomas Hill, as they sat down together.

"The result is, that Fosbrook will wait a few days, Hill; three or four, he says. Perhaps that may be extended to five or six: I don't know. After that—if he is not visibly satisfied that things are right and not wrong, as far as he is concerned—there will be no further waiting."

"And the storm must burst."

"The storm must burst," echoed Peter Castlemaine,

"But what can be done in those few poor days?" cried Thomas Hill, in agitation. "Nothing. You must have more time allowed you, sir."

"I had trouble to obtain even these few days, Hill."

"Do you see any chance yourself, sir?"

"Only one. There is a chance; but it is a very remote one. That last venture of mine has turned up trumps: I had the news by the mail this morning: and if I can realize in time, the present danger may be averted."

"And the future also," spoke Thomas Hill, catching eagerly at the straw of hope. "Why, sir, that will bring you in a mine of wealth."

"Yes. All I want now is time. I have said it before, perhaps too sanguinely; I can say it in all truth now."

"And, sir—did you not prove this to be the case to Mr. Fosbrook?"

"I did. But, alas! I had to deny my other pressing liabilities—and he questioned sharply. Nevertheless, I shall tide it over, if I can only secure time. That account of Merrit's—we may as well go over it together now, Thomas. It will not take long."

They drew their chairs together. A thought was running through Thomas Hill's mind, and he spoke it as he opened the ledgers.

"With this good news in store, sir, making repayment certain—for if time be given you, you will now have abundance—don't you think Mr. Castlemaine would advance you funds?"

"I don't know," said the banker. "James seems to be growing cautious. He has no idea of my real position—I shrink from telling him—and I am sure he thinks that I am quite rich enough without borrowing money from any one for fresh speculations. And, in truth, I don't see how he can have much money at command. This new trouble, that may be looming upon him, will make him extra cautious."

"What trouble?" asked Thomas Hill.

"Some man, I hear, has made his appearance at Greylands, calling himself Anthony Castlemaine, and saying that he is a son of my brother Basil," replied the banker, confidentially.

"Never!" cried the old man. "But, sir, if he be so, how should that bring trouble on Mr. Castlemaine?"

"Because the stranger says he intends to claim Greylands' Rest."

"He must be out of his mind," said Thomas Hill. "Greylands' Rest is Mr. Castlemaine's; and without dispute, I presume."

"But such a man may give trouble, don't you see."

"No, sir, I don't see it—with all deference to your opinion. Mr. Castlemaine has only to prove to him that it is his, and send him about his business——"

A knock at the room-door interrupted them. The clerk rose to open it, and received a card and a message, which he carried to his master. The banker looked rather startled as he read the name: "Anthony Castlemaine."

About an hour before this, young Anthony Castlemaine, after a late breakfast, had turned out of the Dolphin to walk to Stilborough. Repulsed by his uncle on the previous day, and not exactly seeing what his course should be, he had come to the resolution of laying his case before his other uncle, the banker. Making inquiries of John Bent as to the position of the banker's residence, he left the inn. The road to Stilborough was lonely enough, no dwelling to be seen all the way, save a farm homestead here and there lying away amidst its buildings; but Anthony Castlemaine walked slowly, taking in all the points of his native land, that were so strange to his foreign eye. The sky was blue, the sun bright, he enjoyed the walk, and did not hurry himself: nevertheless he at length reached Stilborough, and the banker's house. He rang at the private door.

The servant who opened it saw a young man dressed in a rather unusual overcoat, trimmed with fur. The face was that of a stranger; but the servant fancied it was a face he had seen before.

"Is Mr. Peter Castlemaine at home? This is his residence I am told."

"Yes, sir, it is."

"Can I see him? Is he at home?"

"He is at home, in his private room, sir; I fancy he is busy. I'll ask if you can see him. What name shall I say, sir?"

"You can take my card in. And say to your master that, if he is busy, I can wait."

The man glanced at the card as he knocked at the door of the private room, and read the name: "Anthony Castlemaine."

"It must be a nephew from over the sea," he shrewdly thought: "he looks foreign. Perhaps a son of that lost Basil."

We have seen that Thomas Hill took in the card and the message to his master. He came back, saying the gentleman was to wait; Mr. Peter Castlemaine would see him in a quarter-of-an-hour. So the servant, beguiled by the family name, thought he should do right in conducting the stranger upstairs to the presence of Miss Castlemaine, and said so, while helping him to take off his over-coat.

"Shall I say any name, sir?" asked the man, as he laid his hand on the handle of the drawing-room door.

"Mr. Anthony Castlemaine."

Mary Ursula was alone. She sat near the fire doing nothing, and very happy in her idleness, for her thoughts were buried in the pleasures of the past night. When the announcement was made, she rose in great surprise to confront the visitor. The servant shut the door, and Anthony came forward.

He bowed, and held out his hand with a frank smile. Mary Ursula did not take it: she was utterly puzzled, and stood gazing at him. His likeness to her father's family struck her forcibly. It must be premised that she did not yet know anything about Anthony, or that such a person had made his appearance in England. Anthony waited for her to speak.

"If I understood the name rightly—Anthony Castlemaine—you must, I presume, be some relative of my late grandfather's, sir?" she said at length.

Then he introduced himself; told her who he was, and all about it. Mary Ursula met his hand cordially, never doubting his identity for a moment. She had the gift of reading countenances; and she took to the pleasant, honest face at once, so like the Castlemaines in features, but with a more open expression.

"I am quite sure you are my cousin," she said, in earnest welcome. "I think I should have known you for a Castlemaine had I seen your face amongst a thousand."

"I see, myself, how like I am to the Castlemaines, especially to my father and grandfather: though unfortunately I have not inherited their height and strength," he added, with a slight laugh. "My mother was small and slight; I take after her."

"And my poor uncle Basil is dead!"

"Alas, yes! Only a few weeks ago. I am in mourning for him."

"I never saw him," said Miss Castlemaine, gazing at the familiar—for indeed it seemed familiar—face before her. "But I have heard that my uncle Basil was the image of his father."

"He was so," said Anthony. "When I saw the portrait of my grandfather yesterday at Greylands' Rest, I thought it must be my father's hanging there."

It was long since Miss Castlemaine had met with any one she liked so well at a first interview; and the quarter-of-an-hour passed quickly. Then the servant again appeared, saying his master would see him in his private room. So he took leave of Mary Ursula, and was conducted to it.

But, as it seemed, Mr. Peter Castlemaine did not wait to receive him: for almost immediately he presented himself before his daughter.

"This person has been with *you*, I find, Mary Ursula! Very wrong of Stephen to have brought him up here! I wonder what possessed him to do it?"

"I am glad he did bring him, papa," was her impulsive answer. "You have no idea how sensible and pleasant he is. I could almost wish he were more even than a cousin—a brother."

"Why, my dear, you must be dreaming!" cried the banker, after a pause of astonishment. "It does not do to take strange people on trust in this way. The man may be, and I dare say *is*, an adventurer," he continued, testily: "no more related to the Castlemaines than I am related to the King of England."

She laughed. "You may take *him* upon trust, papa, without fear. He is a thorough Castlemaine in everything except height. The likeness to grandpapa is wonderful; it is so even to you and to Uncle James. But he says he has all necessary credentials with him."

The banker, who was then looking from the window, stood in deep thought. Self-interest sways us all. The young man was no doubt the individual he professed to be: but if he meant to put in a claim to Greylands' Rest, and so upset James, the banker might receive no loan from him. He turned to his daughter.

"You believe then, my dear, that he is really Basil's son?"

"Papa, I think there is no doubt about it. I feel sure there

can be none. Rely upon it, the young man is not one who would deceive, or countenance deception: he is evidently honest and open as the day. I scarcely ever saw a truer face."

"Well, I am very sorry," returned the banker. "It may bring a great deal of trouble upon James."

"In what way, papa?" questioned Mary Ursula, in surprise.

"This young man—as I am informed—has come over to put in a claim to Greylands' Rest."

"To Greylands' Rest!" she repeated. "But that is my uncle James's! How can any one else claim it?"

"People may put in a claim to it; there's no law to prevent that; and I fear this young man means to do so," replied the banker, taking thought and time over his answer. "He may cost James no end of worry and expense."

"But, papa—I think indeed you must be misinformed. I feel sure this young man is not one who would attempt to claim anything that is not his own."

"But if he supposes it to be his own?"

"Greylands' Rest his own? How can that be?"

"My dear child, as yet I know almost nothing. Nothing but a few words that Mrs. Castlemaine said to me last night. I only know that Basil as much believed Greylands' Rest would descend to him as he believed in his Bible. However, I must go down and see this young man."

As soon as Peter Castlemaine entered his private room, and his eyes rested on the face of the young man who met him so frankly, he saw the likeness to the Castlemaines. That it was really his nephew, Basil's son, he had entertained little doubt from the first; none, since the recent short interview with his daughter. With this conviction on his mind, it never would have occurred to him to deny or doubt the young man's identity, and he accepted it at once. But though he called him "Anthony," or "Anthony Castlemaine"—and now and then by mistake "Basil"—he did not betray any mark of gratification or affection, but was distant and cold; and he thought it very inconvenient and ill-judged of Basil's son to be bringing trouble on James.

A few minutes were naturally spent in questions and answers, chiefly as to Basil's career abroad. Young Anthony gave every information freely—just as he had done to his uncle James on

the previous day. After that, he passed on to the subject of the inheritance.

"Perhaps, Uncle Peter, you will not refuse to give me some information about my grandfather's estate, Greylands' Rest," he began. "My father always assured me it would be mine. He said it would come to him at his father's death, and then to me afterwards——"

"He must have spoken without authority," interrupted the banker. "It did not necessarily lapse to Basil, or to any one else. Your grandfather could leave it to whom he would."

"Of course: we never understood otherwise. But my father always said that it would never be left away from him."

"Then I say, that he spoke without sufficient authority," repeated the banker. "Am I to understand that you have come over to this country to put in a claim to Greylands' Rest, on this sole justification?"

"My father, on his dying bed, charged me to come and claim it, sir. He had bequeathed it to me in his will. It was only quite at the last that he learnt his father was dead, and he made a fresh will at once, and charged me to come over without delay. When I presented myself to my uncle James yesterday, he seemed to resent the fact that I should put in any claim to the estate. He told me I had no right to do so; he said it was his."

"Well?" said the banker; for the young man had paused.

"Uncle Peter, I am not unreasonable. I come here to find my uncle James in possession of the estate, and quite ready, as I gather, to oppose my claim to it; or, I should better say, to treat me and my claim with contempt. Now I do not forget that my grandfather had the power to leave it to Uncle James——"

"Most undoubtedly he had," again interrupted the banker. "And I can tell you that he never, to the very last, allowed any one to interfere with his wish and will."

"Well, I say I am not unreasonable, sir. Though I have come over to claim the estate, I should not attempt to lay claim to it in the teeth of facts. I told my uncle James so. Once let me be convinced that the estate was really and fairly bequeathed to him, and I would not for the world disturb him in its possession."

"You doubt his word, then?"

Young Anthony hesitated before replying; and then spoke out straightforwardly.

"The fact is, Uncle Peter, I deem it *right* to assure myself by proof of how the matter stands; for my father warned me that treachery might——"

"Treachery!" came quickly from the banker, his dark eyes flashing fire.

"My father thought it possible," quietly continued the young man; "he feared that, even though Greylands' Rest were legally mine, my claim might be opposed. That is one reason why I press for proof; I should press for it if there existed no other. But I find that there are doubts as to how Mr. James Castlemaine came into the estate, and whether it became lawfully his on my grandfather's death."

"Doubts! Doubts where?"

"Amongst the people of Greylands. I have heard one and another talking about it."

"Oh, indeed!" was the cold rejoinder. "Pray where are you staying?"

"At the Dolphin Inn. When I descended, and saw the flaming dolphin on the sign-board, splashing up water, I could not help smiling. My father had described it so accurately, that it seemed like an old acquaintance."

Mr. Peter Castlemaine made no rejoinder, and a silence ensued. In truth, his own difficulties were so weighty that they had been pressing on his mind throughout, as an undercurrent of trouble, and for the moment he was lost in them.

"Will *you*, Uncle Peter, give me some information of the true state of the case?" resumed the young man. "I came here purposely to ask you. You see, I want to be assured one way or the other. I again repeat that I am not unreasonable; I only ask to be dealt with fairly and honourably. If Greylands' Rest is not mine, prove it to me; if it is mine, I ought to have it. Perhaps you will tell me how it was left."

The banker suddenly dropped his seals, with which he had been playing during the last appeal, and turned his full attention to the speaker, answering more frankly than he had yet spoken.

"When your father, Basil, went away, he took his full

portion of money with him—a third of the money we should inherit. I received my portion later on; James received his. Nothing remained but Greylands' Rest and the annuity—a large one—which your grandfather enjoyed from his wife's family: an annuity which had nothing to do with us, for it would lapse at his death. Greylands' Rest could be disposed of as he pleased. Does it strike you as strange, Anthony, that he should prefer its passing to the son who was always with him, rather than to the son who had abandoned him and his home, and whom he did not even know to be living?"

"Uncle, I have said that I see reasons why my grandfather might make his second son his heir, rather than his eldest. If he did so, I am ready and willing to accept the fact, but I must be convinced that it is fact. Is it not true that my grandfather always intended to leave the estate to his eldest son Basil?"

"That is true," assented the banker, readily. "No doubt that was his intention at one time. But Basil offended him, and went out of sight and mind, and James remained with him and was always a dutiful son. It was much more natural that he should bequeath it to James than to Basil."

"Well, will you give me the particulars of the bequest, sir?"

"I decline to give you more particulars than I have already given," was the prompt reply of the banker. "The affair is not mine; it is my brother James's. You find him in possession of the estate; you are told that it is his; and that ought to suffice you. It is very presumptuous on the part of Basil's son, to come over in this extraordinary manner, without warning, and attempt to question the existing state of things. That is my opinion, Anthony."

"Is this your resolve, sir?—not to help me?"

"My final resolve. I have enough to do in attending to my own affairs, without interfering with my brother's."

Anthony Castlemaine took up his hat, and held out his hand. "I am very sorry, Uncle Peter. It might have saved so much trouble. Perhaps I shall have to go to law about it."

The banker shook hands with him in a sufficiently friendly spirit: but he did not ask him to remain, or to call again.

"One hint I will give you, Anthony," he said, as the young man turned to the door; and he spoke apparently upon impulse.

"Were you to spend your best years and energies upon this search, you would be no wiser than you are now. The Castlemaines do not brook interference; and they know how to hold their own."

"I am a Castlemaine, too, uncle, and can hold my own with the best of them. Nothing will turn me from my course in this matter, excepting the proofs I have asked for."

Anthony put on his coat in the hall, and went forth into the street. There he halted, as though uncertain of his way.

"A few doors to the right, on the other side the market-house, John Bent said," he repeated to himself. "Then I must cross the street, and so onwards."

He crossed over, went on past the market-house, and looked attentively at the doors on the other side. On one of these was a brass-plate: "Mr. Knivett, Attorney-at-law." Anthony Castlemaine rang the bell, asked if the lawyer was at home, and sent in one of his cards.

He was shown into a small back-room. At a table strewn with papers and pens, sat an elderly man with a bald head, who was evidently regarding the card with the utmost astonishment. He turned his spectacles on Anthony, and the latter, in the frank, free way that seemed so especially to characterize him, put out his hand as to a friend.

"You knew my father well, sir. Will you receive his son for old memories' sake?"

"Your father?" asked Mr. Knivett, questioningly: but nevertheless meeting the hand with his own, and glancing again at the card.

"Basil Castlemaine. He who went away so long ago from Greylands' Rest."

"Bless my heart!" cried Mr. Knivett, snatching off his glasses in his surprise. "Basil Castlemaine! I never thought to hear of him again. Why, since he left, it must be—ay—it must be hard upon five-and-thirty years."

"About that, I suppose, sir."

"And—has he returned?"

Anthony had again to go over the old story. Mr. Knivett, who was considerably past sixty, and had put his spectacles on again, never ceased gazing at the narrator, as they sat nearly knee to knee. Not for a moment did any doubt occur to him

that the young man was other than he represented himself to be: the face was the face of a Castlemaine, and of an upright gentleman.

"But I have come to you, not only to show myself to a friend of my poor father's in his youth, but also as a client," proceeded Anthony, after a short time. "I have need of a lawyer's advice, sir; which I am prepared to pay for according to your English charges. Will you advise me?"

"To be sure," replied Mr. Knivett. "What advice do you want?"

"First of all, sir—in the days when my father was at home, you were solicitor to my grandfather, old Anthony Castlemaine. Did you continue so until his death?"

"I did."

"Then you can, I hope, give me the particulars that I desire to know. To whom was Greylands' Rest bequeathed—and in what manner was it devised?"

Mr. Knivett shook his head. "I cannot give you any information upon the point," he said. "I must refer you to Mr. Castlemaine."

"I have applied to Mr. Castlemaine, and to Mr. Peter Castlemaine also: neither of them will tell me anything. They met me with a point-blank refusal to do so."

"Ah—I dare say. The Castlemaines never choose to be questioned."

"Why will not you give me this information, Mr. Knivett?"

"For two reasons. Firstly, because the probability is that —pray understand me, young sir; note what I say—the probability is that I do not possess the information. Secondly, if I did possess it, my relations with the family would prevent my imparting it to you. I am the attorney to the Castlemaines."

"Their confidential attorney?"

"Some of the business I transact for them is confidential."

"But see here, Mr. Knivett—what am I to do? I come over at the command of my father, delivered to me on his death-bed, to put in my claim to the estate. I find my uncle James in possession of it. He says it is his. But when I ask him for proof, he replies that I must be satisfied with his word. Now, is that satisfactory?"

"I dare say it does not appear so to you."

"If a will was made, let me see the will; or if it was bequeathed by a deed of gift, then show me the deed. Can anything be fairer than what I ask? If Greylands' Rest is legally my uncle James's, I should not be so foolish or so unjust as to wish to deprive him of it."

Mr. Knivett sat back in his chair, pressing the tips of his fingers together, and politely listening. But comment made he none.

"To go back home, without prosecuting my claim, is what I shall never do, unless I am convinced that that claim does not exist," continued Anthony. "Well, sir, I want legal advice as to how to set about investigating the affair; and hence I come to you."

"I have shown you why I cannot advise you," said Mr. Knivett—and his manner had turned ever so many degrees colder. "I am the attorney to Mr. Castlemaine."

"You cannot help me at all, then?"

"Not in this."

It sounded hard to the young man as he rose from his seat to depart. All he wanted was fair play, straightforward dealing; and it seemed that he could not obtain it.

"My uncle Peter, with whom I have just been, said a thing that I did not like," he paused to remark; "it rather startled me. I presume—I should think—that he is a man of strict truth?"

"Mr. Peter Castlemaine? Undoubtedly."

"Well, sir, what he said was this. That were I to spend my best years and energies in the search after information, I should be no wiser at the end than I am now."

"That I believe to be extremely probable," cordially assented the lawyer.

"But do you see the position in which it would leave me? Years and years!—and I am not to be satisfied one way or the other?"

The attorney froze again. "Ah, yes; true."

"Well, sir, I will say good-day to you, for it seems that I can do no good by remaining, and I must not take up your time for nothing. I only wish you had been at liberty to advise me."

Mr. Knivett made some civil rejoinder about wishing it also,

They parted, and the young man found himself in the street again. Until now it had been one of the brightest of days; but during his short interview at the lawyer's, the weather seemed to have changed. The skies, as Anthony Castlemaine looked up, were now dull and threatening. The clouds had gathered. He buttoned his warm coat about him, and entered upon his walk back to Greylands.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE MOONLIGHT.

White clouds were passing over the sky, casting their light and their shade on the ever-changing sea. To Anthony Castlemaine, gazing at it from his bedroom at the Dolphin Inn, no object in nature had ever seemed so beautiful. The vineyards of his native land; the sunny plains of Italy; the grand mountains of Switzerland: all these he had been accustomed to from his youth, and they were fair to look upon: but to him they were as nothing, compared with this wide, wondrous, ever-restless sea.

A very few days had elapsed since his visit to Stilborough. Another week had come in, and this was Tuesday: destined to be a most fatal day for more than one person connected with our story. The dark clouds that had threatened his homeward walk that afternoon, had passed off without falling; the cold itself seemed on the next day to have taken its departure. With that caprice that distinguishes our insular climate, the frost and keen east wind had given place to warm, cheering spring weather.

Anthony Castlemaine had opened the casement to admit the fresh sea-breeze, and stood there in profound thought. On the table lay a letter he had just written. Its black seal bore the Castlemaine crest, and it was addressed to his native place, Gap, in the Dauphiné. Some shouting arose on the beach, and drew his attention. A fishing-boat was preparing to put out; one of her men had not come down, and the voices of two others and the shrill treble of a boy were raised in trying to rouse the laggard. He went dashing out of the Dolphin Inn, just under the gaze of Anthony,

Anthony Castlemaine was in perplexity. He did not see his way any clearer than he had seen it when he first came. That Greylands' Rest was legally his he now entertained no doubt about; but to prove it was another matter. He and Mr. Castlemaine had met one day near the Dolphin; they had talked for a few minutes, but Anthony could make out nothing. Twice since then he had presented himself at Greylands' Rest, and Mr. Castlemaine had been denied to him. It was evident that he meant to have nothing more to do with Anthony.

The waves sparkled and rippled; the sun came out from behind a fleecy cloud, and shone with renewed strength; a vessel in the distance was passing with all her sails set.

"It is strange behaviour," mused Anthony. "If the estate legally belongs to my uncle James, why can he not prove it to me? His refusing to do so is sufficient evidence to me that it is mine. I *must* get to see him: it is impossible to remain in the dark like this."

Taking up the letter, he went down, crossed to the little general shop near the beach, and dropped it into the letter-box. He was quite at home in Greylands now, had made acquaintance with its inhabitants, and was known and recognized as the grandson of old Anthony Castlemaine. In returning, he met one of the Grey Sisters, and bowed to her with marked respect; for he regarded the Grey Ladies as a religious order, and in his native land these communities are specially reverenced. Little Sister Phœby—she was short and stout, and nearly middle-aged, and only one of the working sisters—bobbed down in return, giving him a kindly good-morrow.

"And John Bent thinks that Mr. Castlemaine derides these good ladies!" thought Anthony. "It must be fancy. John has many fancies. Dear me!—that charming demoiselle again!"

She was advancing swiftly, as if to overtake Sister Phœby, her pretty figure becomingly attired in a light silk dress and short scarlet cloak with silken tassels; her beautiful eyes cast on the sea with the same look of affection that Anthony's sometimes wore when gazing at it. Anthony Castlemaine had seen few faces in his life that in goodness and beauty equalled Ethel Reene's.

He stopped and she frankly held out her hand to him. Mary

Ursula had told her how favourably he had impressed her, and Ethel accepted him as one of their house.

"Are you going to make a long stay at the Dolphin?" she asked, when they had exchanged greetings.

"That must partly depend on Mr. Castlemaine," replied Anthony. "He will not grant me an interview, and for myself I can scarcely see a step before me. I must ask him once more to listen to me; I hope he will do so. I had some thought of going to him this afternoon."

"He is at home," said Ethel, innocently, who only very imperfectly understood the trouble looming between the young man before her and Mr. Castlemaine.

"At home now? Then I will go to him at once," said he, on the impulse of the moment: and he again offered his hand to Ethel. "I hope we shall be friends, Miss Ethel, and meet often."

Ethel laughed. "Good-bye,' she returned gaily. "Friends always, Mr. Anthony Castlemaine; almost relatives; though you know that I am not really a Castlemaine."

And during her after-life Ethel was wont to look back often on this little meeting, and to feel thankful that it had taken place, and that it was a pleasant one. For she never again saw the ill-fated young man in this world.

Recrossing the road, and passing the inn, Anthony turned into the fields on his way to Greylands' Rest. They were pleasanter than the road that sunny afternoon. He walked along in deep thought, deliberating on what he should say.

Ah, if he could only have seen behind him! A double shadow followed him—like that of Miss Kilmansegg going up the stairs to her doom. Nearer and nearer it had been gradually drawing as the days went on; and now on this day it lay ready to close on him—as it would close ere the clock had told many more hours: the dreadful, ominous shadow of death. Of a death done in darkness and secret.

In the last field, side by side with the avenue that led to Greylands' Rest, while Anthony was wondering whether he should be permitted to see his uncle or not, the latter suddenly stood before him, coming through the little gateway that led into the field.

The Master of Greylands, erect and handsome, would have

passed him with a slight nod, but Anthony put himself in his way.

"Uncle James, I beg your pardon; I would not wish to be rude; but will you allow me to speak a few little words to you?"

"I am in a hurry," said Mr. Castlemaine.

"Will you then give me a short interview at your house this evening? Or to-morrow morning, if that will suit you better."

"No," replied Mr. Castlemaine.

"Twice I have been to Greylands' Rest, asking for you; and twice have I been denied. Though the last time I think you were at home, and that you saw me from the window."

"You cannot have anything to say to me that I wish to hear, or that would be profitable to yourself," returned the Master of Greylands: "for that reason I was denied to you. Our first interview was not so satisfactory that we need wish for another."

"But it is necessary that we should converse," returned the young man. "I am waiting to have this question settled as to Greylands' Rest."

"What question?" demanded Mr. Castlemaine, with haughty indifference—just as though he had quite forgotten that anything had ever arisen in regard to it.

"Greylands' Rest is yours, Uncle James, or it is mine. I must ascertain to which of us it belongs. You decline to tell me——"

"Decline to tell you," interrupted Mr. Castlemaine. "Cannot you use your own eyes and judgment, and see that it is mine."

"I see that you are in possession of it; I see no farther. You decline to show me anything of the facts: my uncle Peter declines to do so; Knivett, the attorney-at-law, declines."

"Have you applied to Knivett?"

"Yes, last week."

The eyes of Mr. Castlemaine flashed fire. "How dare you do such a thing, sir, as attempt to interfere in my affairs? Tamper with my man of business! By Heaven, I have a great mind to prosecute you!"

"Do not let us quarrel, Uncle James; suffer me to say what little I have to say quietly. I did not go to Mr. Knivett otherwise than openly. He said he could tell me nothing; and I

recognized the weight of his objection: he is your attorney, and cannot be mine."

"Perhaps you tried to bribe him to act for you," scoffed Mr. Castlemaine, who was foolishly beginning to lose his temper.

"I would not do any mean or dishonourable thing, sir; I am a Castlemaine, and my father's son. But what I have to say is this. Matters cannot rest as they are: and I wish you fully to understand what my course will be if you do not give me the proof I require, as to the true ownership of Greylands' Rest. Only show me that it is yours, and I make my bow, and depart from Greylands."

"You are pretty insolent for a young man!" retorted Mr. Castlemaine, looking down on him with scorn. "Do you suppose such an application was ever made to a gentleman before? You speak of your father, my brother Basil: had some impudent stranger presented himself before him, and demanded to see title-deeds of his, what would his answer have been, think you?"

"Circumstances alter cases," returned Anthony. "My case is different from the imaginary one you are putting. Only satisfy me that the place is yours, and I ask no more. I have a right to know so much."

"You never shall know it: you shall never know more than you know now from me. Do your best and worst."

"Then you will leave me no resource but to proceed," returned the young man, who maintained his temper and his courtesy in a marked degree. "I shall employ the best lawyer I can call to my aid, and act on his advice. The matter has become the talk of the neighbourhood. It says that you ought to satisfy me, and that you would do so if it were in your power."

"What?" roared Mr. Castlemaine.

Had Anthony foreseen the storm he was provoking, he had surely not continued. But the young man, who was by nature just, honourable and kindly, who had never in his life attempted to take a mean advantage of friend or enemy, felt half ashamed and deeply grieved to be thus thrown into antagonism with his newly-found relatives; and he sought to show that he was justified in the course he was now pursuing.

"It is not my fault, uncle, if the people give their opinion:

I did not ask them for it. What they say has reason in it, as it seems to me. The popular belief prevailed that my grandfather would not leave his estate away from his eldest son, Basil, and when it was never known how he did leave it, or to whom, or anything about it, excepting that his second son remained in possession, why, they talked. That is what I am told. It would be a satisfaction to the public as well as to me, if you suffered the truth to be known."

It was not often that the Master of Greylands allowed anger to overpower him. In his younger days he had been subject to fits of intemperate passion, but time and self-control had very nearly stamped out the failing. Perhaps until this moment he had believed it had left him for ever. His passion rose now, and he poured forth a torrent of abuse.

"Go back whence you came, insolent upstart!" were his concluding words. "You are no true son of my brother Basil. Ill-doing though he was, he was not a fire-brand, striving to bring dissension into a peaceable community."

"I shall never go back until I have cleared up this matter," spoke the young man, firmly: and it may be that his unruffled temper, his calmness of bearing, only served to irritate Mr. Castlemaine the more. "The best lawyer that London will afford I shall summon to my aid: he must force you to show the title by which you hold possession of the estate; and we shall then see whether you or I have most right to it."

The words inflamed Mr. Castlemaine almost to madness. With a strong oath—and bad language, though common enough then, he was rarely, if ever, betrayed into—he lifted his hand as if to strike. Anthony, startled, moved away.

"What have I done to merit this treatment?" he remonstrated. "Is it because I am a relative? You would not, for shame, so treat a stranger."

But the Master of Greylands, flinging back a word and look of utter contempt, went striding on his way, leaving his nephew alone.

Now it happened that this contest was witnessed by the superintendent of the coastguard, Mr. Nettleby, who was walking along the path of the neighbouring field behind the distant hedge, bare at that season. He could not hear the words that passed—the whole field was between—but he saw they were

fiery, and that the Master of Greylands was in an ungovernable passion. Calling in at the Dolphin, he related before one or two people what he had seen: and Anthony, when he returned soon after, gave the history of the interview.

"I'm sure I thought Mr. Castlemaine struck you, sir," resumed the officer.

"No; but he would have liked to strike me," said Anthony. "I moved away in time. It is very foolish of him."

"I think he would like to murder Mr. Anthony, for my part, by the way he treats him," said John Bent. But the words were only spoken in the heat of partisanship, just as we are all given to hasty assertions on occasion. However, they were destined to be remembered by Greylands.

Somewhat later John Bent and his guest were standing at the front-door, talking together of the general perplexity of things. The sun was setting in the west in beautiful clouds, showing the advance of evening. John began to think he had better be laying the cloth for the parlour dinner, unless he wanted his wife about him. And—here she was! she and her cherry-coloured ribbons right over his shoulder.

At that moment, careering down the road from Greylands' Rest, came Harry Castlemaine on his spirited horse. His overcoat was rolled up and strapped on the saddle, and he looked as though mounted for a journey.

"Going out a-pleasuring, Mr. Harry?" cried the landlady, as he reined-in.

"Business, not pleasure," corrected the young man, in his free and careless manner, as he nodded and smiled at Anthony —for he did not share in his father's unfriendly feeling towards their new relative, though he had not yet made any advances towards intimacy. "A fine sunset, is it not?"

"Quite beautiful," replied Anthony.

"I am bound for Newerton, Mrs. Bent," resumed Harry. "Can I do anything for you there?"

"Nothing, thank you, sir."

"Not even choose you some cap-ribbons? Newerton ribbons, you know, take the conceit out of those at Stilborough."

"You must always have your joke, Mr. Harry! As if a fine young gentleman like you would trouble himself to choose an old woman's cap-ribbons!"

"See if I don't bring you some! Meanwhile, John, suppose you give me a glass of ale, to speed me on my journey."

The landlord brought the ale; and Harry Castlemaine, after drinking it, with a general nod, an intimation that he should return on the morrow, and a wave of the hand to his cousin, rode away.

Anthony went round the corner of the house to look after him. Not being great in horsemanship himself, he admired those who were so. He admired also the tall, fine form, the handsome face, and the free, frank bearing of Harry Castlemaine; and a hope in that moment arose in his heart that they might become good friends, if he remained in England. He stood and watched him up the road until the turning hid him from view. Harry's route lay past the Grey Nunnery, past the coastguard station higher up, and so onwards. Newerton was a town of some importance, about ten miles distant.

The remaining events of the evening, so far as they concerned Anthony Castlemaine, were destined to assume importance and to be discussed for days and weeks afterwards. He dined at six, John Bent waiting on him as usual; afterwards, he sat alone for an hour or two in deep thought. At least, Mrs. Bent, coming in to take away his coffee-cup, assumed him to be deep in thought, as he did not speak to her, an unusual thing. He sat between the table and the fire, his elbow resting on the former and his fingers pressing his right temple. The landlady had never known him so still, or so solemn; there was an expression of care upon his face, such as she had never seen there—so she afterwards declared to the world. Could it have been that in those last few hours of his life on earth, a foreshadowing of the dreadful fate about to overtake him was presented in some vague manner to his mind? It might have been so.

About nine o'clock he suddenly asked the landlord to bring down his inkstand and paper-case, which he had left in his bedroom; and then he wrote a letter, sealed it as he had the one in the afternoon, and placed on it the same address. By-and-by, John Bent came in again to look to the fire.

"I have made up my mind to seek another interview with Mr. Castlemaine before I apply for legal advice," spoke Anthony.

"Bless me!" exclaimed John Bent, for the words surprised him.

"Yes. I have been thinking it well over from beginning to end; and I see that I ought to give my uncle one more opportunity of settling it amicably, before bringing the dispute openly before the world, and causing a scandal. He was in a frightful passion this afternoon; when he has had time to reflect he may become more reasonable."

John Bent shook his head. In his own mind he did not believe that fifty fresh appeals would have any effect on Mr. Castlemaine.

"The meeting might only lead to another quarrel, Mr. Anthony."

"Well—yes—I have thought of that. And I fear he would injure me if he could," added the young man, in a dreamy tone, and speaking to himself more than to his landlord. "There: don't put more coal, please; it is too warm."

John Bent went away with his coal-scuttle. He remarked to his wife that their inmate did not seem in his usual good spirits. Mrs. Bent, trimming one of her smart caps at the round table by the fire, answered that she knew as much as that without being told; and that he, John, had better see that Molly was properly attending to the company in the public-room.

It was considerably past ten, and the company—as Mrs. Bent called them, which consisted principally of fishermen—were singing a jovial song, when Anthony Castlemaine came out of the parlour, his letter in hand. Just as he had posted the one written in the afternoon, so he went over to the box now and posted this one. After that, he took a turn up and down the beach, listening to the low murmuring of the sea, watching the moonbeams as they played on the water. It was a most beautiful night; the air still and warm, the moon unusually bright. That Greylands' Rest was his own legally, and would soon be his own actually, he entertained not a doubt, and he lost himself in visions of the pleasant life he might lead there. Thus the time slipped on unconsciously, and when he got back to the Dolphin the clock had struck eleven. John Bent's company were taking their departure—for the house closed at the sober hour of eleven—John's man was shutting the shutters, and John himself stood outside his door, a pipe in his mouth.

"A lovely night, sir," he began. "Almost like summer. I've been finishing my pipe outside on the bench here."

"Lovely indeed," replied Anthony. "I could never tire of looking at yonder sea."

They paced about beforet he bench, and presently extended their stroll up the hill. Mr. Nettleby's residence, a fair-sized cottage, stood back from the road in its small garden, just opposite the Grey Nunnery; and Mr. Nettleby, also smoking his pipe, was at the outer gate.

When that fatal night was gone and past, and people began to recall its events, they said how chance trifles seemed to have worked together to bring about the evil. Had Anthony Castlemaine not written that letter, the probability was that he would never have gone out at all; on returning from the post and the beach, had the landlord not been outside the inn, he would at once have entered: and finally, had the superintendent not been at his gate, they would not have stayed abroad.

Mr. Nettleby invited them in, hospitably offering them a pipe and glass. He had business abroad that night, and therefore had not retired to rest. They consented to enter, "just for a minute."

The minute extended itself to the best part of an hour. Once seated by the fire, and plunged into gossip, they were in no hurry to move again. Anthony Castlemaine accepted a pipe, John Bent refilled his. The former took a glass of sugar-and-water—at which Mr. Nettleby made a wry face; John Bent had a glass of weak Hollands, which lasted him during the visit: he was no drinker.

The conversation turned on various matters. On the claims of Anthony to Greylands' Rest, which had become quite a popular topic; on the social politics of Greylands, and on other subjects. Under a strong injunction of secrecy, Mr. Nettleby imparted certain suspicions that he was entertaining of a small hamlet called Beeton, a mile or two higher up the coast. He believed some extensive smuggling was carried on there, and he purposed paying a visit to the place that very night, to look out for anything there might be to see. Anthony inquired whether he was very much troubled by smugglers, and the superintendent said No; very little indeed, considering that the coast lay so convenient for Holland and other suspicious countries: but he had his doubts.

They all went out together. It was twelve o'clock, or close

upon it. Mr. Nettleby's road lay to the left; theirs to the right. However, they turned to accompany him a short distance, seduced to it by the beauty of the night.

"In for a penny, in for a pound," thought John Bent. "The missis can't go on more if I stay out for another hour than she'll go on now."

But they did not walk far: just to the top of the hill, and a short way beyond it. They then wished the officer good-night, and turned back again.

The Friar's Keep looked ghostly enough in the moonlight. Anthony Castlemaine glanced up at its roof, dilapidated in places, at its dark casement windows. "Let us watch a minute," said he, jestingly, "perhaps the Grey Monk will appear."

John Bent smiled. They had passed the entrance to Chapel Lane, and were standing within the thick privet hedge and the grove of trees which overshadowed it. Not that the trees gave much shadow at that season, for their branches were bare.

"Tell me again the legend of the Grey Monk," said Anthony. "I partly forget it."

John Bent proceeded to do as he was bid, lowering his voice as befitted the time and subject. But he had scarcely begun the narrative when the sound of approaching footsteps struck on their ears, and his voice involuntarily died away into silence. At the first moment, they thought the superintendent was returning.

But no. The footsteps came from Chapel Lane. They drew more closely within cover of the hedge, and waited. A gentleman, walking fast and firmly, emerged from the lane, crossed the road, went in at the gate of the chapel ruins, seemed to take a hasty glance out over the sea, and then passed into the Friar's Keep. Very much to the astonishment of John Bent, and somewhat to that of Anthony, they recognized Mr. Castlemaine.

"He was taking a look at the sea by moonlight," whispered Anthony. "I'll go after him, and we'll have it out under the moonbeams. What's he doing now, I wonder, in the Friar's Keep?"

Before John Bent could stop him—and, as the landlord said later, an impulse prompted him to attempt it—the young man

was off like a shot; had entered the gate in the wake of his uncle, and disappeared within the cloisters of the Keep.

The Master of Greylands must have emerged safely enough from those ghostly cloisters: since he was out and well the next day as usual: but the ill-fated Anthony Castlemaine was never again seen in life.

CHAPTER VIII.

COMMOTION.

On that same fatal Tuesday—and fatal it might well be called, so much evil did it bring in its train—there was commotion at Stilborough. Disagreeable rumours were abroad touching the solvency of the bank. Whence they arose, who had originated them, and what they precisely meant, no one knew, no one could tell: but they were being whispered about from one to another, and the bank creditors rose up in fear and astonishment.

"It cannot be true." "*What* is it?—what's wrong? Not possible that Peter Castlemaine can be shaky. Where did you hear it? I'd trust the bank with my life, let alone my money." "But it's said that some gigantic speculation has failed?" "Nonsense! the bank would stand twenty failures: don't believe a syllable of it." "Well, rumour says the bank will stop to-morrow." "Stop to-morrow! What shall we do for our money?" "Don't know. *I* shall get mine out to-day."

The above, and similar sentences, might be heard from different people in the streets of Stilborough. Those who were ultra-cautious went into the bank and asked for their balances. At first Thomas Hill paid out, hoping the demands were only in the regular course of business: but in a short time he saw that a run upon the bank was setting in; and he went into Mr. Peter Castlemaine's private room to consult his master. Fortunately the rumours had only arisen late in the afternoon, and it was now within a few minutes of the time of closing. Not that, earlier or later, it could have made much difference to the calamity itself; but it saved some annoyance to the bank inmates. Had the house been solvent, it would of course have kept its

doors open, irrespective of hours and customs; being insolvent, it closed them to the minute, and the shutters also. Had Mr. Peter Castlemaine been able to meet the demands for money, he would have been in the public room with a calm bearing, reassuring the applicants: as it was, he bolted himself into his parlour. The clerks drew down the shutters and closed the doors against the public: two or three of the young men, who had to go out with letters or messages, escaped through the private entrance. Back went Thomas Hill to his master, and found the door fastened.

"It is only me, sir. All's safe."

Peter Castlemaine opened it. A change that the faithful old clerk did not like to see was in his face. Hill's own face was startled and white enough just then, as he well knew; but it could not wear the peculiar, sickly, shrunken look he saw on his master's.

"Where are they, Thomas? Is it really a run upon the bank?"

"Really and truly, sir. What an unfortunate circumstance! A few days, and you would have tided it over."

"But where are they all?"

"Outside, sir, in the street, clamouring at the doors and windows; a crowd by this time, and increasing every minute. We managed to get the doors shut as the clock struck, and then let down the shutters."

Mr. Castlemaine drew his hand across his aching brow. "I think this must have been caused by Fosbrook," he remarked. "He may have dropped an incautious word."

"He wouldn't do it, sir."

"Not intentionally: for his own sake. I knew it boded no good when I found he meant to stay on at the Turk's Head. Alas! alas!"

"There has not been a regular stoppage," said Thomas Hill. "And if we can manage to obtain assistance, and open again to-morrow morning——"

"Don't, Hill," interrupted the banker, in a tone of extreme pain. "Don't speak of hope! There's no hope left."

"But, sir, when the remittance, which we are expecting, arrives——"

"Hush! look here,"

Mr. Peter Castlemaine pushed an open letter towards his clerk. The old man's hands trembled, and his face grew whiter as he mastered the contents. Hope was indeed gone. The worst had come. An embargo had been laid in London upon the hoped-for remittances.

"Did you receive this letter this morning, sir? Why did you not tell me? It would have been better to have stopped then."

"I received it ten minutes ago, Thomas. It was sent from town by a special messenger in a post-chaise and four; which, of course, will be charged to the estate. He came, by mistake, I suppose, to the private door; or perhaps he saw the crowd at the bank door: and he gave the letter into my own hands, saying he would take my instructions back to town to-morrow morning, if I had any. All's over."

Too truly did Thomas Hill feel the force of the words. All *was* over. But for this last misfortune, this lien upon the money that ought to have arrived, they might have weathered the storm. The past few days had gone on pretty quietly; and every day, passed without exposure, was so much gained. The Master of Greylands, when applied to by his brother for a loan, had listened, and placed at the bank's disposal a fairly good sum: not enough, not half enough, to meet the emergency, but still a great help.

"Even now," began Thomas Hill, breaking the depressing silence, "even now, sir, if a meeting were called, and a statement of facts properly laid before the creditors, they might consent to allow you time."

"Time!" echoed Mr. Peter Castlemaine. "What, with this crowd clamouring at the doors!—and with Fosbrook in the place!—and with a lien on all forthcoming remittances! And," he added, the grey look on his countenance becoming more perceptible, as his voice fell to a whisper: "and with the discovery at hand of the use I made of the Armannon bonds! The closing hour has come, Thomas, and nothing can save me!"

Thomas Hill took off his spectacles to wipe the mist away. The failure of the bank, and the disgrace attaching to these pecuniary misfortunes, seemed as nothing, compared with the guilty shame that must fall on his master.

"They may prosecute me criminally," breathed Mr. Peter Castlemaine, from between his dry and ashen lips.

"No, no," burst forth Thomas Hill. "They'll never do that, sir. Think how you have been respected! And besides—so far as I can understand the complication—there will be money to pay every one."

"Every man will be paid in full to the uttermost farthing," spoke the banker, emphatically. "But that's another thing. I sat up over my books nearly all last night, making my calculations, and I find that there will be funds to meet all claims. Only there's the waiting! Nothing over perhaps; but there will be as much as that."

"And to think that this miserable trouble should intervene!" cried Thomas Hill, wringing his hands. "There will be my six thousand pounds to help you, sir, with the expenses, and all that."

Peter Castlemaine shook his head at the last sentence, but he made no verbal denial. He seemed to have neither words nor spirit left, and sat leaning his brow upon his hand. The once fine fresh colour that was natural to him had faded, though its traces might still be seen. In all his long experience Thomas Hill had never, to his recollection, seen a man change so rapidly.

"You look ill, sir," he said. "Let me get you something."

"I feel ill," was the answer. "I ought to have confronted those people just now in the other room, and should have done so, but that I felt physically incapable. While I was reading the letter brought by the London messenger, a sharp, curious pain seized me here," touching his left side. "For some minutes I could not move."

"Is the heart all right?" hesitated the clerk—as if afraid to breathe the question.

"I do not know. During the past twelve months, since these troubles set in, I have had a good deal of fluttering there: pain, too, at times."

"You should consult a doctor, sir. Don't, pray, delay it."

"Ay," sighed the unfortunate man. "I suppose I should. When I am a little out of this fret and turmoil—if I ever am out of it—I'll see one. Lock the desk for me, will you, Hill? There's nothing to keep it open for: no use poring over ledgers now."

He held out the key, sitting as he was, and Thomas Hill

locked the desk and returned the key to him. Strength and health seemed suddenly to have gone out of Peter Castlemaine.

"There's one thing I wanted to say, Thomas," resumed the banker. "That young man who came here last week—my brother Basil's son, you know."

"I've heard he is at Greylands, sir. Young Anthony, they say."

"Ay. Basil named him after the father. I should have done the same, had a son been born to me. He came here that day, you know, asking me to tell him how Greyland's Rest was left; and I fear I was a little abrupt with him. I did not wish to be so; but this—this trouble was lying on me heavily. The young fellow spoke fairly enough; and, I dare say, I appeared cold and formal. He wanted me to interfere between him and James; a thing I should never think of doing. I've thought about it since, lying awake at night; and I want you to tell Anthony for me that I meant nothing, should you ever see him."

"But surely you will be seeing him yourself, sir!" cried the clerk, thinking this a little strange.

"I don't know that I shall. Should James prove to him that he has no claim, he may be going off to France again. As to me, why, how do I know where I shall be, or how things will go with me? Tell him, Thomas, that Greylands' Rest, as far as I know, is legally my brother's. But James would never do so, were it not his."

"Did you not know, then, how the estate was left, sir?"

"No; I did not trouble myself about it," was the banker's answer: and all this time he seemed to be speaking as his faithful clerk had never before heard him speak. Instead of the shrewd, intellectual man of business, with every sense on the alert, he seemed weary and passive as a tired child. "I know Greylands' Rest would not be mine; that if it was not left to Basil it would be James's. James remained in possession of it, and I supposed it to be his. I took that for granted, and never questioned him. I firmly believe that my father left it to him: and, Thomas, tell this young Anthony that this is my candid opinion. I don't think there can be a doubt about it. James ought to prove this to him: Basil's son has a right to demand proof. Only, don't say so; I do not want, I say, to interfere with James."

"It would be the easiest way of settling the matter, sir, if Mr. Castlemaine would do that."

"Of course it would. But then, you see, James never chooses to be questioned. As a boy, I remember, nothing ever offended him so much as doubting his word."

At that moment there was a ring heard at the house-door. The banker looked startled, and seemed to shrink within himself.

"It is that Fosbrook!" he exclaimed. "I thought he would be coming. I cannot see him. *You* go, and battle it out with him, Thomas: he won't browbeat *you*. Don't let him come in here for the world."

But it was only one of the clerks, returning from his errand. Thomas Hill, seeing the nervous state his master was in, proposed to proceed at once to the Turk's Head, and hold there an interview with the dreaded creditor: and the banker seized upon it eagerly.

"Do, do!" he said. "There's no one I dread as I dread him."

As the clerk went out, he saw that many people lingered yet around the house and doors. He went amongst them: he begged them to be quiet for that evening, to leave matters until the morning, for that Mr. Peter Castlemaine was ill and unable to see any one. The angry creditors showered questions on the unfortunate clerk—who certainly felt the trouble as keenly as his master. Thomas Hill answered them to the best of his ability: and at length one by one the malcontents took their departure, leaving the street clear and the house quiet.

And no sooner was this accomplished, than the banker's handsome barouche drove up to the door, containing Miss Castlemaine and her chaperon, Mrs. Webb, who had returned to her post the previous day. Opposite to them sat William Blake-Gordon. All were in high spirits, talking and laughing as though no such thing as care existed in the world, and utterly unconscious of the trouble that had fallen on the house, and the commotion that had reigned without. They had been to look over Raven's Priory, and Mary Ursula was enchanted with it.

"You will stay and dine with us, William," she said, as he handed her out of the carriage. "Papa will be vexed if you do not."

He was only too ready to accept an invitation that would give him a few more hours of her sweet companionship. It was close upon the dinner-hour—six. Stephen was holding the hall-door open, with a long, grave face: they passed him, noticing nothing.

"I will not be long, William," she whispered, passing up to her chamber.

A little later, and she came forth again, attired for the evening. Her dress was of rich blue silk; her cheeks were flushed with pleasurable excitement; her bright hair was disposed so as to set off the rare beauty of her face. Mr. Blake-Gordon stood in the gallery, looking at a new picture that some friend had recently given to the banker. As she joined him, he drew her arm within his.

"It is a fine painting, Mary."

"And it is well hung," she observed, "the light of the chandelier just falls on it. Have you seen papa yet?"

"Not yet. There goes six o'clock."

Mrs. Webb, an elderly lady in black satin and point-lace cap, came downstairs and turned into the drawing-room. Though a very dragon of a chaperon when necessary, she knew quite well when to join the lovers, and when to leave them alone.

They began pacing the gallery, arm-in-arm, criticising the pictures. From paintings, their conversation turned to what just then held a deeper interest for them—the future residence they expected so soon to enter upon. This room should be the favourite morning-room, and that the favourite evening-room; the charming conservatory should have their best care; the gravel drive should be widened; rocks and ferns should fill up certain bare spaces—and so the dreams went on.

The clocks went on also: but Mr. Peter Castlemaine did not appear in the drawing-room. Mrs. Webb, reminded probably by her appetite, looked out once or twice; but the lovers were unconscious of clocks and reminding appetites; for love, as we all know, lives upon air. So they paced on, those two, in their dream of happiness.

"My dear, is your papa out, do you know?" questioned Mrs. Webb, appearing at the drawing-room door, as they again neared it. "It is half-past six."

"Half-past six!" repeated Mary, in surprise. "So late as that! No, I do not know whether papa is out or in. Perhaps he is busy in his parlour? Stephen," she added, quitting the arm of Mr. Blake-Gordon, and advancing towards the man, who was then crossing the gallery, "is papa below in his room?"

"No, ma'am, for I've just been to look," was the answer. "I saw my master go up to his chamber some time ago, but I don't think he can be there all this while."

"How long ago?"

"Just before you came home, ma'am."

"Of course, your master cannot be there still," interposed Mrs. Webb, much interested in the colloquy, for she wanted her dinner frightfully. "He must have come down and gone out, Stephen."

"Very likely, ma'am."

"Or papa may have dropped asleep on the sofa in his room," interposed Mary Ursula. "Twice lately he has done so after a very tiring day."

She ran lightly up the stairs as she spoke, and knocked at the chamber-door. The lamp that hung in the corridor threw its light upon the oaken panels, and upon her gleaming blue dress.

"Papa!"

There was no response, and Mary gently turned the handle, intending to open the door about an inch, and call again. She felt sure that he was lying fast asleep on the sofa. But the door would not open.

"Papa!"

No: he did not awake, though she called loudly. Hardly knowing what to do, she ran down again.

"I cannot make papa hear, and the door is locked," she said, chiefly addressing Stephen, who was nearest to her. "I dare say he has had a fatiguing day."

"Yes, ma'am, it *have* been fatiguing; leastways the latter part of it," replied the man, with an emphasis they failed to notice. "Some rude people have been knocking here, and making a fine uproar."

"Uproar!" exclaimed Mrs. Webb, taking him up sharply. "What do you mean? What did they want?"

"I don't know what they wanted, ma'am: something they

couldn't get, I suppose," returned the man, who had no suspicion of the real state of the case, for he supposed the house to be simply a mine of wealth as unlimited as the riches in the fairy tales that children believe in.

What more would have been said was stopped by the appearance of Thomas Hill. He had just returned from his mission to the Turk's Head. Apparently it had not been a pleasant mission: for his face was pale with what looked like fear, and waiving ceremony, he had come straight up the stairs, asking for his master.

"I must see him instantly. I beg your pardon, Miss Castlemaine, but it is of the utmost importance."

Had the clerk only waited a moment before speaking, he would have heard that the banker was fastened in his room. They told him now. He gave one alarmed look around while taking in the words, and then hurried to the stairs.

"Follow me," he cried, turning his pale face to the men. "We must break open the door. I know he is ill."

Mr. Blake-Gordon, the butler and Stephen were up almost as soon as he. Mrs. Webb laid her detaining arm on the young lady.

"You must stay here, my dear: I insist upon it. They will do better without you. Hark! the door has given way."

Sleep? Yes, at first they thought the banker was asleep. He lay on the sofa at full length, his head on the low cushion. A candle, which he must have carried up with him, stood on the drawers, and the wax candles previously lighted by the servants were burning. Altogether there was a good deal of light in the room. They looked more closely at the banker's face: and saw—that the sleep was the sleep of death.

As Thomas Hill leant over him he burst into tears. But the events of the afternoon had somewhat prepared him for it, and he was less stunned than the others. They could not think that it was death.

"Run for a doctor!" cried the butler to Stephen. "It may be only a faint. Run for your life!"

The butler himself did not attempt to run; he was too stout. Mr. Blake-Gordon and Stephen, both slender and light of limb, sped away in different directions. The butler raised his master's head.

"Please ring the bell, sir, for some brandy," he said to Mr. Hill. "Let the maids bring up hot flannels, too."

"Is it possible that you can be deceived?" wailed the clerk. "Do you not see that it is death? My poor master?"

The doctors arrived without delay, two of them; for Mr. Blake-Gordon brought one, and Stephen another. But nothing could be done: it was indeed death: and the medical men thought it had taken place probably an hour ago. The great banker of Stilborough, Peter Castlemaine, had ceased to exist.

But there was one momentous, one dreadful question to be solved—what had caused the death? Had it come by God's hand and will?—or had Peter Castlemaine himself wrought it? The surgeons expressed no opinion at present; they talked in undertones, but did not let the world share their counsels. Thomas Hill overheard one word, and it almost drove him frantic.

"How dare you say it, gentlemen? Mr. Peter Castlemaine would no more lift his hand against himself than you would lift it. I would stake all the poor bit of life left to me—it won't be much now—that it is the heart that has killed him. This very afternoon he complained of a sharp pain there: a strange fluttering, he called it, and he looked white as a ghost. He told me he had felt the same pain and fluttering before at times. There cannot be a *doubt*, gentlemen, that it was the heart."

The doctors nodded apparently in assent. One thing appeared indisputable—if the death was natural, no other cause than the heart could be assigned for it. The face of the dead man was calm and unruffled as that of an infant. But the elder of the doctors whispered something about an "odour."

Mary Ursula came into the room when the medical men had gone. No tears were in her eyes; she was as one paralyzed: unable in her bewilderment to take in the whole truth. She had deemed the room empty: but Thomas Hill turned from the sofa at her entrance.

"He has had a good deal of trouble lately, my poor dear master, and it has been too much for him and broken his heart," he whispered in piteous tones. "God knows I would have saved him from it if I could, my dear young lady: I would willingly have died for him."

"What sort of trouble has it been?" asked Mary Ursula, gazing at the old clerk with a terrified and imploring countenance.

"Money trouble, money trouble," answered the clerk. "He was not used to it, and it has broken his heart. Oh, my dear, don't grieve more than you can help!—and don't think about the future, for all I have shall be yours."

"You—think—it was heart disease?" questioned Mary, in a dread whisper. "You *really* think so, Mr. Hill?"

"My dear, I am *sure* of it. Quite sure. And I only wonder now he did not die in my arms this afternoon in the bank parlour when the pain and fluttering were upon him," added Thomas Hill, with emotion. "There was a great clamour with the creditors, and it terrified him more than I imagined. The fright must have struck to his heart, and killed him."

She sighed deeply. The same appalled look clung to her face: the reassurance did not seem to bring her the comfort it ought to do. For Mary Castlemaine had overheard that one word of suspicion breathed by the medical men: and she had, and always would have, the awful doubt lying upon her heart.

It was a dreadful night for her, poor bankrupt girl—bankrupt in happiness from that hour. Mrs. Webb persuaded her to go to bed at last; and there she lay getting through the hours as the unhappy do somehow get through them. But, miserable though it was, it would have been far more so could she have seen, as in a mirror, what had taken place that night in the Friar's Keep—the disappearance of Anthony Castlemaine, and its cause.

CHAPTER IX.

A CURIOUS STORY.

It was a bright morning, a soft westerly breeze blowing. The sea sparkled in the sunlight; the small boats danced upon the waves; the birds sang merrily, and cheated one into a belief that spring had come in.

There had been commotion in the streets of Stilborough on the previous day, and especially around the banker's door, as

we have already seen; but that commotion was as nothing compared with the stir that this morning agitated Greylands. For, report was running wildly about that some mysterious and unaccountable disaster had happened to Anthony Castlemaine.

Anthony Castlemaine had disappeared. No other word was applicable to the event: he had *disappeared.* And as Greylands had taken a warm liking to the young man, it rose up in agitation. Almost with day dawn the village was being searched for him and inquiry made. People turned out of their cottages, fishermen left their boats, some of the Grey Sisters even came forth from the Nunnery: all eagerly asking what and how much was true.

The originator of the rumour was John Bent. He did not seem to know a great deal more than other people; but no one, save himself, knew anything at all. The Dolphin Inn was besieged; work stood still; Mrs. Bent allowed even her servant, Molly, to stand listening, her arms akimbo, unreproved.

The story told by John Bent was a curious one. And, it should be intimated, that, but for the fears stirring the landlord's own breast, the disappearance would not have been thought so much of at this early stage. But John Bent had caught up the idea that some fatal harm had chanced to the young man: in fact, that he had been murdered! The landlord acknowledged that he could not account for this strong impression; but it was there, and he confessed it freely. The substance of his tale was as follows.

After Anthony Castlemaine had darted off in the wake of his uncle the Master of Greylands, as previously related, John Bent stood watching for a minute or two, but could not see or hear anything of either of them. Then, finding the night-air somewhat cold, he paced up and down the path, never losing sight of the opposite gate, and waiting for Anthony to return. Close upon this there rang out the report of a pistol. It was accompanied almost simultaneously by an awful cry; the cry of a man in extreme agony. John Bent wondered where the cry came from and what it meant; but he never connected either cry or pistol with Anthony Castlemaine. The time passed: John Bent began to find this waiting wearisome; he thought what a long confab his guest was enjoying with Mr. Castle-

maine, and hoped they were settling matters amicably: and he wondered somewhat at their remaining in that dark, ghostly Keep, instead of choosing the open moonlit cliff. By-and-by a sailor staggered past—for he had been taking more than was good for him—towards his home in the village. He was smoking; and John Bent took his own pipe from his pocket, filled it, and lighted it by the sailor's. The pipe consoled John Bent, and the minutes passed somewhat less tediously: but when one o'clock rang out and there were no signs of the young man, he began to think it strange. "Surely they wouldn't stay all this time in that Friar's Keep!—not a place to sit down on, and nothing but cold cloisters to walk or stand in!" cried John to himself—and he deliberated what he should do. The prospect of marching into the haunted Keep in search of his guest was not altogether to his taste, for John Bent did not like the idea of meeting ghosts more than did Greylands: neither did he care to return home and leave Anthony Castlemaine to follow at his leisure. Another quarter-of-an-hour elapsed; and then—finding there was no help for it, and quite tired out—he put on a bold spirit, and crossed over to the gate. But it was locked.

John Bent stood transfixed with astonishment. For that gate had never been known to be locked within his remembrance. There certainly was a lock upon it, but it had always wanted a key. The latch was all the fastening ever used or needed. What on earth could it mean?

He shook the gate. At least, he would have shaken it, had it been less substantial: but it scarcely moved under his hand. And then he shouted at the top of his voice, hoping his guest would hear.

"Mr. Anthony Castlemaine! Shall you be much longer, Mr. Anthony Castlemaine?"

The light breeze took his voice over the chapel ruins and carried its echoes out to sea; but there came back no other answer of any kind.

"Well, this is a rum go," cried John, looking round about in his bewilderment. "Surely Mr. Anthony can't have come out and gone home!" he added, the improbable notion flashing on him; for, when thoroughly puzzled we are all apt to catch at straws. "He couldn't have come out without my seeing him,

unless it was just at the moment that I lighted my pipe by Jack Tuff's, when my back was turned. But if so—how was it Mr. Anthony did not see me?"

Unable to solve these doubts, but still thinking that was how it must have been, the landlord went home with a rapid step. Before he gained it, he had quite made his mind up that it was so; he fully believed that his guest was by this time sound asleep in bed, and he called himself a donkey for having waited so long. John Bent turned the handle of his door to enter softly, and found it fastened. Fastened as firmly as the gate had been.

"Where's Ned, I wonder?" he cried aloud, alluding to his man; and he knocked pretty sharply with his hand.

There was no more response to the knock than there had been to the shouts he had lately sent forth. He knocked again. The moonbeams still played upon the sea; a white sail or two of the night fishing-boats gleamed out; he put his back against the door and gazed on the lovely scene whilst he waited. No good, as he knew, to go round to the front-entrance; that was sure to be closed. John knocked the third time.

The window above his head was flung open at this juncture, and Mrs. Bent's nightcapped head appeared.

"Oh, it's you, is it!" she cried tartly. "I thought, for my part, you had taken up your abode in the road for the night."

"Ned's sitting up, I suppose, Dorothy. Why does he not open the door?"

"Ned will not open the door till he has my orders. A pretty decent thing for a respectable householder of your age to come home between one and two in the morning! If you are so fond of prancing up and down the road in the moonlight, filling a fresh pipe at every trick and turn, why don't you stay there till the house is opened to-morrow?"

"Jack Tuff must have told you that!"

"Yes, Jack Tuff did tell me," retorted Mrs. Bent. "I stayed at the door waiting for you till half after twelve. And a tidy state *he* was in!" added the good lady, in growing wrath.

"Let me come in, Dorothy. I've not stayed out all this time for pleasure—you may be sure of that."

"You've stayed for aggravation perhaps; to keep people up. Where's Mr. Anthony Castlemaine?"

"He's come home, isn't he?"

"I dare say you know very well whether he is or not!" returned Mrs. Bent, from her elevation.

"But, Dorothy woman, it's for him I've been waiting. He went into the Friar's Keep, and has never come out again—unless he came out without my seeing him."

"The Friar's Keep!" repeated the landlady, in her most mocking tones. "What excuse will you invent next?"

"It's no excuse. We saw Mr. Castlemaine go in, and Mr. Anthony followed him, saying he'd have the quarrel out under the moonlight. And there I stood cooling my heels outside, waiting for him; till at last I began to think he must have come out and passed me unseen. He *has* come home, hasn't he?"

"He has *not* come home," said Mrs. Bent.

"Well, let the door be opened."

As the story sounded mysterious, and Mrs. Bent had her curiosity, and as her husband moreover was a staid man, not given to this sort of offence in general, she allowed him to come in, herself opening the door. He gave her a summary of the story, she wrapped in a warm shawl while she stood listening to it and making her comments. Anthony Castlemaine had not returned home; she had seen nothing of him; or of any one else, tipsy Jack Tuff excepted.

A presentiment of evil crept over John Bent. For the first time, he began to connect the pistol-shot he had heard with the young man, and to wonder whether the agonized cry had been his. He went into Anthony's bedroom, and saw with his own eyes that it was empty. It was not that he questioned his wife's word; but he felt altogether confused and doubtful—as though it were impossible that Anthony could be thus unaccountably absent.

"I must go back and look for him, Dorothy woman."

"You'll take the key with you, then," said Mrs. Bent; who, for a wonder, did not oppose the proposition: in fact, she thought it right that he should go. And back went John Bent to the Friar's Keep.

He did not at all like this solitary walk, lovely though the

night was. The Grey Nunnery lay steeped in silence and gloom; not a single light shone from any of its windows; a sure sign that just now it contained no sick inmates. John Bent reached the gate again, and the first thing he did was to try it.

It yielded instantly. And the man stood not less amazed than he had before been to find it fastened. At that moment the sound of approaching footsteps in the road struck on his ear; he turned swiftly, his heart beating with eager hope: for he thought they might prove to be the steps of Anthony Castlemaine.

But they were those of Mr. Nettleby. The officer was returning from his night supervision, whatever it might especially be. John Bent met him, and told his tale.

"Nonsense!" cried the superintendent, after he had listened. "They would not be likely to stay long in those deserted cloisters. Are you sure it was Mr. Castlemaine you saw go in?"

"Quite sure. But I can't think what he wanted there."

"You don't think you were dreaming?" asked Mr. Nettleby, who by this time evidently fancied the tale was altogether more a dream than a reality. "I don't believe the gate has a key, or that it ever had one."

He was examining the gate as he spoke. The lock was there as usual; but of sign that a key had been in it that night there was none. Crossing the ruins, they stood looking out over the sea; at the moonlight glittering upon the water and the distant fishing-boats. From that they went into the Friar's Keep. Its moss-eaten Gothic door lay open to the chapel ruins. Stone pillars supported the floor which the spirit of the dead-and-gone Grey Friar was supposed to haunt. It was a ghostly-looking place altogether; the moonlight casting weird shadows about the pillars and the broken arches above. They stood on the stone floor of those cloisters—as people had fallen into the habit of calling them—and shouted out the name of Anthony Castlemaine. Neither sight nor sound came back in answer: all was quiet and lonely as the grave; there was not the slightest sign that any one had been there that night.

"If they *did* come in here, as you say," observed Mr. Nettleby, the same ring of disbelief in his voice, "I'll tell you what it is,

Bent. They must have come out again at once, and gone home together to Greylands' Rest."

This view of the case had not presented itself to the mind of John Bent, but he at once accepted it as the most feasible solution of the problem. But he did not feel quite satisfied; for it was difficult to fancy that Anthony Castlemaine would go off without warning him. Still he accepted it; and he and the officer quitted the Keep, and turned their steps homeward. In his own mind the superintendent fully believed that John Bent had been asleep and dreaming; it was so impossible to fancy any sane man pacing the chapel ruins or the Keep at night. And the Master of Greylands, of all people!

"Did you come upon the trail of any smugglers at Beeton?" asked John Bent.

"No," said Mr. Nottleby, rather savagely, for he had had his night's work for nothing. "Couldn't see any traces of them. I suspect Beeton, though, and believe it contains a nest of the lawless wretches!"

He turned in at his own gate as he spoke. The landlord went on, and was speedily at home again. Anthony Castlemaine had not come in.

Before eight o'clock in the morning, John Bent, feeling doubtful and uneasy, went up to Greylands' Rest. He noticed that all the blinds were down and some of the shutters closed. Miles, the servant-man, was at the back-entrance, shaking mats.

"I thought none of you could be up yet," began the landlord, "with all the blinds down! The house looks as though somebody had died in it."

"And somebody has died, more's the pity; though not in the house," replied Miles, turning his concerned face upon the speaker. "A messenger was here soon after six this morning to fetch the master to Stilborough. Mr. Peter Castlemaine died suddenly last night."

The landlord was shocked. He could scarcely believe it. "Mr. Peter Castlemaine dead!" he exclaimed. "It can't be true, Miles."

"It's too true," returned Miles.

"But he was so strong and healthy—without a trace of illness about him!"

"Ay. They say it was the heart."

"Well, it's sad news any way, and I'm sorry for him," said John Bent. "Is young Mr. Castlemaine here?"

"Not just now. He'll be home some time this afternoon. He went off to Newerton yesterday on business."

"I don't mean Mr. Harry. I mean Mr. Anthony Castlemaine."

"What should bring that young man here?" loftily retorted Miles, who made a point of sharing in all his master's prejudices.

John Bent told his tale. It was listened to with doubting ears.

"My master at the Friar's Keep, at twelve o'clock at night! Well, I wonder what next you'll say, Mr. Bent?"

"But I saw him go in," returned John Bent.

"It couldn't have been him. What should he want there? When us servants went to bed at ten, the master was in the red room. As to that other young man you speak of, that he has not been nigh the house *I* can answer for."

John Bent felt as if he were in a fog. "You say Mr. Castlemaine is at Stilborough, Miles?"

"He went off soon after six o'clock. And wasn't he cut up when he heard the news about his brother!" added Miles. "His lips and face had no more colour in them than *that*"—pointing to a snowdrop under the wall. "He looked just like a man who had had a shock."

It was of no use lingering. Anthony Castlemaine was not to be heard of at Greylands' Rest. John Bent took his departure; and, in the absence of any other clue, went making inquiries in the village. Before long, not a single inhabitant, from one end of it to the other, but had heard and was making comments on his tale.

The Dolphin Inn was crowded that day, its landlord the centre of attraction. People were in and out incessantly, listening to the singular history. Numbers flocked to the Friar's Keep, and to every other spot in Greylands likely or unlikely for a man to hide in, living or dead; but no trace was found of Anthony Castlemaine. Apart from the disappearance, the tale itself excited wonder; and that portion of it relating to the visit of Mr. Castlemaine into the chapel ruins, the subsequent sound of a shot and cry, and the locked gate, was received by some with incredulity. Opinions were hazarded that the land-

lord's eyes and senses might have deceived him. Mr. Castlemaine might have been a myth; the locked gate only his awkwardness, the shot and cry nothing but the scream of a sea-bird. In this latter point, however, John Bent's account was established by other testimony, coming, singularly, from the Grey Ladies. It appeared that Sister Mildred was very ill that night, and two of the others sat up with her, Sisters Mona and Ann. The room of the Lady Superior faced the sea, and was the room at the end next the chapel ruins. As the Sisters sat there watching in the stillness of the night, they were suddenly startled by the sound of a shot, and by a scream as from some one wounded. So, in regard to this part of John Bent's account, there could no longer be a doubt.

In the afternoon Mr. Castlemaine returned from Stilborough. The commotion Greylands was in rendered it impossible for him to remain long in ignorance of what had taken place, and of the manner in which his name was mixed up with it. Being a man of quick perception, he could not fail to see that some suspicion must attach to himself in the public mind. The alleged story, taken in conjunction with previous facts: the pretensions of his nephew to Greylands' Rest, and their hostile meeting in the fields earlier in the day: must inevitably excite doubt and comment. Proud and self-contained though the Master of Greylands was, this matter was of too grave a nature, and might bring too many unpleasant consequences in its train, to be ignored. He deemed it well to throw himself forthwith into the battle; and he went out to the Dolphin. On his way he encountered Commodore Teague. The latter had been at sea since early morning in his cutter—as he would call that boat of his—and had only now, on landing, heard the story. A few sentences exchanged between Mr. Castlemaine and the Commodore, and they parted; the former proceeding to the inn.

"What *is* this absurd story?" he demanded of John Bent, lifting his hat as he entered the best kitchen to the group of people assembled there. "I cannot make head or tail of it."

For the fiftieth time at least, the landlord recounted the history. It was listened to with breathless interest, even by those who had done nothing but listen to it for many previous hours.

"And do you expect sensible people to believe this?" were the first words of the Master of Greylands in reply.

"It's true, whether they believe it or not," said John. "It was yourself, sir, was it not, that we saw pass through the gate into the chapel ruins?"

"*I!*" scornfully repeated Mr. Castlemaine. "What do you suppose should take me to such a place as that, at midnight? If all your points are as correct as that one, Bent, your story will not hold water."

"I said it was not likely to be Mr. Castlemaine," spoke up the coastguard superintendent. "I told Bent so at the time."

"I put it to you all, generally, whether it *was* likely to be me," pursued Mr. Castlemaine, glancing defiantly about him.

"All I can say is this," returned John Bent: "that if it was not Mr. Castlemaine, my eyes must have strangely deceived me, and young Mr. Anthony's must have deceived him. Why, the night was as light as day."

"Eyes do deceive sometimes," remarked Mr. Castlemaine. "I know that mine have occasionally deceived me at night, good though they are. And of all deceptive lights, moonlight is the worst."

"Sir, if it was not you it must have been your wraith," said John Bent, evidently not inclined to give in. "You passed us close, coming out of the Chapel Lane, and crossing the road in front of us. Had you turned your head sharp round to the right, you must have seen us under the hedge."

"Was it the Grey Friar, think you?" asked Mr. Castlemaine. And John Bent did not like the bantering tone, or the suppressed laugh that went around.

"That some one crossed from the Chapel Lane may be true: for I do not see how you could simply imagine it," conceded Mr. Castlemaine, after a pause. "But it was not I. Neither can I understand nor conceive what any one should want in the chapel ruins at that time of night. We are most of us rather given to shun the place."

"True" murmured the room.

"And the locked gate," proceeded Mr. Castlemaine, "how do you account for that? Where did the key come from? According to what you say, Mr. Anthony Castlemaine himself must have locked it; since you maintain that no one went in

or came out after he did. If he locked it, he must have unlocked it. At least, that is the natural inference to be drawn."

"I say that the gate never was locked," put in Superintendent Nottleby. "The latch might have caught somehow, and caused Mr. Bent to fancy it locked."

"You may as well tell me I don't know when a door is open and when it's shut," retorted John Bent.

"And the pistol, again!" remonstrated Mr. Castlemaine. "It does not stand to reason that people should be firing off pistols at midnight. I fancy that must be altogether a mistake——"

"The Grey Ladies can answer for that much, sir," interrupted Mrs. Bent. "As Sister Ann, here, can tell you."

Mr. Castlemaine turned and brought his eyes to bear on Sister Ann. She was sitting in the corner near the clock, basket as usual in hand. For coming out to do errands, she had been seduced into the Dolphin, to take her share in the gossip.

"Yes, sir, we heard the pistol, or gun, whichever it was, and the cry that came with it," she said to Mr. Castlemaine. "Sister Mona and I were watching in Sister Mildred's room—for the fever was very bad upon her last night, and she was restless and wandering, poor lady! It was all quite still. I was knitting and Sister Mona was reading; you might have heard a pin drop indoors or out; when there fell upon our ears a loud shot, followed by a human cry. Both Sister Mona and me started up in terror."

"From what direction did it come?" asked Mr. Castlemaine of the landlord.

"I can't tell, sir. I was walking about on the opposite side of the road, and at first I thought it came from seaward; but it sounded very near."

"It sounded to us as though it came from the chapel ruins, or from the beach below it," said Sister Ann. "We did not hear anything more."

"And it did not occur to me at the time to connect the shot and scream with Mr. Anthony Castlemaine," pursued John Bent. "It does now."

"Well, it is altogether a most extraordinary and unaccount-

able affair," remarked Mr. Castlemaine. "Strange to say, I was out last night myself and near the spot, but not as late as you describe this to have been. Between ten and eleven I went down the lane as far as the Hutt. Teague was, I had heard, proposing to go out in his boat for a few hours to-day; and I, not having been very well lately, thought I should like to go with him, and went down to say so. I stayed and had a pipe with him, and I think it must have been half-past eleven when I left."

"And did you go straight home from the Hutt, sir?" asked John Bent, eagerly.

"I went straight home from the Hutt door to my own door," emphatically replied Mr. Castlemaine.

"And did not go near the other end of the lane at all?—nor the Friar's Keep?"

"Certainly not. I tell you I went straight home: straight from Teague's house to mine."

That Mr. Castlemaine was candid in openly stating this matter, when he might have concealed it, his hearers saw, and it told in his favour. He turned to depart.

"I shall at once institute a thorough search; and, if necessary, summon the law to my aid," said he. "Not that I fear any real harm has befallen my nephew Anthony; but it will be satisfactory to ascertain where he is. I fancy he must have gone off somewhere, perhaps on some sudden impulse. It may be, that he is given to take these impromptu flights; as his father, my brother Basil, was before him."

Mr. Castlemaine passed out as he spoke, with a bend of the head to the company. He looked pale and ill; they could not but notice it throughout the entire interview; and his face had a worn, sad expression of sorrow on it, never before seen there.

"He has brought that look from Stilborough," remarked John Bent. "There are wonders, it's whispered, about his brother's death: we have not got the particulars yet. But as to Mr. Anthony's having walked off in any sudden manner, it's the silliest thought that ever was spoken."

Dusk was approaching when a horseman rode past the Dolphin: Mr. Harry Castlemaine on his return from Newerton. Seeing what looked like an unusual bustle round the inn doors, he pulled up. Molly ran out.

"What's agate?" asked Mr. Harry. "You seem to have all the world and his wife here."

"It's feared as it's murder, sir," returned simple Molly.

"*Murder!*"

"Well, sir, Mr. Anthony Castlemaine went into the Friar's Keep last night, and have never come out again. It's thought he was shot there. A dreadful cry was heard."

"Shot! Who shot him?"

"'Tain't known, sir. Some says it was Mr. Castlemaine that was in there along of him."

Harry Castlemaine drew up his head; a dark frown knitted his brow. But that she was a woman, ignorant and stupid, and evidently unconscious of all that the words might imply, he might have struck her as she stood there.

"And there's dreadful news in from Stilborough, Mr. Harry, sir," resumed the girl. "Mr. Peter Castlemaine was found dead in his chamber last night."

"What?" shouted Harry, thinking she must be playing upon him with all these horrors.

"It's true, sir. The Master of Greylands have not long got back from seeing him. He died quite sudden, poor gentleman, shut up in his room, and not a soul anigh him to watch his last breath."

It was almost too much. His uncle dead, his cousin disappeared, his father suspected he knew not yet of what. Never a more cruel moment than that had dawned for Harry Castlemaine.

CHAPTER X.

BROKEN VOWS.

Evils do not always come singly. It sometimes happens that before one astounding ill is barely glanced at, another has fallen. This was the case at Stilborough.

The town awoke one morning to find that the bank had stopped payment, and that the banker was dead. Never before in the memory of man had similar consternation been known. It can be better imagined than described. At once the worst

was anticipated. No one had ever been so confided in as Mr. Peter Castlemaine. His capacity for business, his honour and integrity, his immense wealth, had passed into a proverb. People not only trusted him, but forced that trust upon him. Many and many a man had placed in his hands all they possessed: the savings perhaps of half a lifetime; and now they saw themselves ruined and undone.

Never had so much excitement been known in the quiet town. Thomas Hill had never been so sought after; so questioned and worried; so raved at and abused as now. All he could implore of them was to have a little patience until accounts could be gone into. Things might not turn out as badly as people supposed. No one listened to him; and he felt that if all days were to be as this day, he should soon follow his master to the grave.

In the very midst of the commotion came news of that other calamity—the mysterious disappearance of young Anthony Castlemaine. He had been seen to enter the Friar's Keep the previous night, and had never come out again. The name of the Master of Greylands appeared to be mixed up in the affair; but in what manner was not yet understood. Verily, misfortunes seemed to be falling heavily just now upon the Castlemaines.

This last event, however, after exciting due comment and wonder, was lost sight of in the other evil: for the first nearly concerned the interests of Stilborough, and the latter did not concern them at all. Their own ruin was the all-absorbing topic in the minds of the bewildered citizens.

An inquiry into the death of Peter Castlemaine ended in a decision that he had died from heart-disease. This was arrived at chiefly by the testimony and urgent representation of Thomas Hill. One of the medical men was supposed to hold a contrary opinion; and the dreadful doubt, previously spoken of, would always lie on Miss Castlemaine's mind; but the other was the accepted view. He was buried in the neighbouring churchyard of St. Mark's: Parson Marston, who had so often and so recently sat at his dinner-table, performing the service.

But the first excitement gradually diminished. For, added to the depression that naturally succeeds to undue emotion, there arose a report that things would be well, after all, and every one would be paid to the full.

It was so. The money that had been so long waited for—the speculation that had at last turned up trumps—was pouring in its returns. And there arose another source of means to be added to it.

One morning, the great Nydwll Mine Company, that had been looked upon as being as good as dead, took a turn for the better; received, so to say, a new lease of life. A fresh vein had been struck: the smallest shareholder might immediately reckon that his fortune was an accomplished fact: and those lucky enough to be largely interested might cease speculating for ever, and pass the time in building castles and palaces—with more solid foundations than the air will furnish—to live in. The shares went up in the market like rockets: every one was securing them as eagerly as we should pick up diamonds if the chance were given to us. In a very short time, the shares held by the house of Mr. Peter Castlemaine might have been resold for twenty times the original amount paid for them.

"Is this true, Hill?" asked Mr. Castlemaine, who had come bounding over on horseback from Greylands' Rest at the first rumour of the news, and found the old clerk at his post as usual, before the private desk that had been his master's. "Can this be true?"

He was changed since his brother's death. That death, or something else, had told upon him strangely. He and Peter had been fond of each other. James had been proud of his brother's position in the county; his influence and good name. The shock had come upon him unexpectedly, as upon every one else: and, in a manner, affected him far more. Then, his interests were largely bound up with those of his brother; and though if he had lost all he had lent him he would still be a rich man, yet the thought was not to be indulged with indifference or contemplated with pleasure. But to do him justice, these considerations sank into insignificance before the solemn fact of his brother's death and the mystery and uncertainty enshrouding it.

"Is it true, Hill?" he reiterated before the clerk had time to reply. "Or is it all a delusion of Satan."

"It is true enough, sir," answered Thomas Hill. "The shares have gone suddenly to ten, twenty times their original value. Alas, that it should be so!"

"Alas!" echoed Mr. Castlemaine. "What mean you, Hill? Has trouble turned your brain?"

"I was thinking of my poor dear master," said the old man. "It was this very mine that helped to kill him. You see now, Mr. Castlemaine, how good his speculations were, how sound his judgment! Had he lived to see this turn of affairs, all would have been well."

"Too late to speak of that," said Mr. Castlemaine, with a deep sigh. "He is dead; and we must now give our attention to the living. This slice of luck will enable you to pay all demands. The shares must be realized at once."

"Enable us to pay every one in full," assented Thomas Hill. "And otherwise we should not have done so."

"A strange chance!" musingly observed Mr. Castlemaine. "A chance that rarely occurs in life. Well, as I say, it must be seized upon."

"And without delay, sir. The shares have gone up unexpectedly, and may fall as suddenly. I'll write to-day."

Mr. Castlemaine rose to depart. The clerk, who was settling to his papers, again looked off to ask a question.

"Have any tidings turned up, sir, of poor Mr. Anthony?"

"None that I have heard of. Good-day, Hill."

The shares were realized; other moneys were realized; and in an incredibly short time, for poor Thomas Hill worked with a will, the affairs of the bank were in a fair way to be settled, every creditor fully satisfied, and the late unfortunate banker's name saved. Anything that had been underhand in his dealing, Thomas Hill and Mr. Castlemaine had contrived to keep from the world.

But one creditor, whose name did not appear on the books, and who had put in no demand to be satisfied, was passed over in silence. Mary Ursula's fortune had been hopelessly sacrificed; and it was already known that little, if anything, would be left for her. She knew how and why her fortune had gone: Mr. Hill had explained it all to her; it had helped to save her father's honour and good name; and had it been ten times the amount, she would freely have given it for such a purpose.

Seeing what it had done, she did not, as far as she herself was concerned, look upon it with one moment's regret. True,

she was now poor; very poor, compared with the past: she would have at most but about a hundred and fifty pounds a-year; but she was in too great trouble to think much of money now. One heavy weight had been lifted—the sickening dread that the creditors would lose part or all of their due. On that one point she was now at rest. But there were other things. There was the undercurrent of fear that her father had not died of heart-disease; there was the mystery attending the disappearance of her cousin Anthony; and there was her own engagement to Mr. Blake-Gordon.

Her position was now so different from what it had been when he proposed to her, and the severity, the pride, the arrogance of Sir Richard so indisputable, that she feared the worst. Moreover, she knew, from the present conduct of both father and son, that she had reason to fear it.

Twice, and twice only, had William Blake-Gordon come to her since her father's death, and he might so easily have come to her every day in her desolation! Each time he had been kind and devoted as ever; not a suspicion, not a hint of separation had appeared in look or tone; but in his manner there had been something never seen before: a reticence; a withholding, as it were, of words that ought to be spoken: and instinct told her that all was not as it used to be.

"How does your father take the news? What does he say to it, and to my loss of fortune? Is he still willing to receive me?" she had asked on each occasion; and as often he had contrived to leave the questions unanswered.

Days went on; her position, as to loss of fortune, was known abroad; and the suspense she endured was telling upon her. One morning at the breakfast-table, as she finished reading some letters that had been delivered for her, Mrs. Webb, who had scanned the addresses from the opposite side of the table, put a question to her.

"Is one of them from Mr. Blake-Gordon, my dear?"

"No," replied Mary. And no one but herself knew what the answer cost her; or how trying was the silence that followed.

"I will end the suspense," she murmured, shutting herself into her own sitting-room when the meal was over. "It is Sir Richard, I know; not William: but at least they shall not find

me willing to enter the family on sufferance. I will give them the opportunity of retiring from the engagement—if they wish to do so."

Drawing her desk towards her, she paused, pen in hand, deliberating how to write. Whether in a cold formal strain, or affectionately as of yore: and she decided on the latter.

"My dearest William,

"My circumstances have so changed since the early days of our engagement, that I feel I am now, in writing to you, adopting the only course left open to me, both in fairness to you and for the sake of my own future happiness and peace of mind.

"When you proposed to me and I accepted you, I was in a very different position from that of to-day. Then I was supposed to be—I supposed myself—a very rich woman. I was the daughter of a man beloved and honoured; a member of a house which, if not equal to your own in the past annals of the country, might at least mix with it on an equality and hold its own amongst gentlemen. All this is now changed. My dear father is no more, my fortune is gone, and I am left with next to nothing.

"That you have asked me to become your wife for myself alone, I feel assured. I am certain that no thought of riches influenced you in your choice; that you would take me now as willingly as in the old days. But instinct—or presentiment—tells me that others will step in to interfere between us, and to enjoin a separation. Should this be the case—should your father's consent, once given, now be withdrawn—then all must be at an end between us, and I will restore you your liberty. Without the full approval of Sir Richard, you cannot attempt to marry me; neither should I, without it, consent to become your wife.

"If, on the other hand, that approval is still held out to us both as freely as when it was first given, I have only to add what you know so well—that I am yours, now as ever.

"Mary Ursula Castlemaine."

The letter written, she hesitated no longer about the necessity or wisdom of the step. Sealing it, she despatched it

by a trusty messenger to Sir Richard's house just without the town.

The news of the failure of the bank and the death of its master, had reached Sir Richard Blake-Gordon when he was at a dinner-party. It fell upon him with startling effect. For a moment he felt half-paralyzed: and then the blood once more took its free course through his veins as he remembered that his son's marriage was yet a thing of the future.

"Never," he said to himself with energy. "Never, as long as I live. I may have a battle with William; but I could always twist him round my finger. In that respect he is his poor mother over again. No such weakness about me. Good Heavens, what an escape! We shall be quite justified in breaking off the engagement; they will both have sense enough to see it."

He was not of those who put off disagreeable things until they will be put off no longer. That very night, meeting his son when he returned home, he began, after expressing regret for the banker's sudden death.

"A sad affair about the bank! Who would have expected it?"

"Who, indeed!" returned William Blake-Gordon. "Every one thought the bank as safe as the Bank of England. Safer, if anything."

"It only shows how all private concerns are more or less subject to fluctuations—changes—failures," continued Sir Richard.

"Whatever this may be—failure or not—it will at least be open and straightforward," said William. "Mr. Peter Castlemaine was the soul of honour. The embarrassments must have arisen from other quarters, and Thomas Hill says the trouble and anxiety have killed him."

"Poor man! People are expecting it to be an awful failure. Not five shillings in the pound for the creditors, and all the Castlemaine family ruined. This must terminate your engagement."

The sudden command fell on the young man's ears with a shock. He thought at the first moment that his father must be jesting.

"Terminate my engagement?" he retorted, catching sight

of the dark stern countenance. "What, give up Mary Castlemaine? Never will I do it so long as I live."

"Yes, you will," said Sir Richard, quietly. "I cannot allow you to sacrifice your prospects in life."

"To give her up would be to sacrifice all the prospects I care for."

"Nonsense, William!"

"Think what it is you would advise, sir!" spoke the son, with ill-suppressed emotion. "Putting aside my own feelings, think of the dishonour to my name! I should be shunned by all good and true men; I should hate myself. Why, I would not live through such dishonour."

Sir Richard took a pinch of snuff.

"These misfortunes only render it the more urgent for me to carry out the engagement, sir. Is it possible that you do not see it? Mary Castlemaine's happiness is, I believe, bound up in me; and mine, I freely avow, is bound up in her. Surely, father, you would not part us!"

"Listen," spoke Sir Richard, in the calm, stern tones he could assume at will, more telling than the loudest passion. "Should Miss Castlemaine become portionless you cannot marry her. Or, if you do, it would be with my curse upon you. I would not advise you, for your own sake, to invoke that. You can look elsewhere for a wife: there are numbers of young women as eligible as ever was Miss Castlemaine."

They talked together far on into the night, the stern tones on the one hand becoming persuasive; the opposition sinking into silence. When they separated, Sir Richard felt that he had very nearly gained his point.

"It is all right," said he mentally, as he stalked up to bed with his candle. "William was always ultra dutiful."

Sir Richard interdicted his son's visits to Miss Castlemaine; and the one or two calls the young man made on her were made in disobedience. But this state of things could not last. William Blake-Gordon, with his yielding nature, had ever possessed a rather exaggerated idea of the duty a son owes his father: moreover, he knew instinctively that Mary would never consent to marry in opposition to Sir Richard, even though he brought himself to it.

It soon became known abroad that Miss Castlemaine's fortune

had certainly been sacrificed. Sir Richard was cold and distant to his son; the young man was miserable.

One day the baronet returned to the charge; intending it to be final. They were in the library. William's attitude was one of utter dejection as he leaned against the window, looking out on the spring sunshine: but sunshine that brought no gladness for him. He saw too clearly what the end would be: his own weakness, or his sense of filial duty, call it which you will, must give way before the stronger nature.

"Your conduct is now simply cruel to Miss Castlemaine," Sir Richard was saying. "You are keeping her all this time in suspense. Or, perhaps—worse still—allowing her to cherish the hope that her altered circumstances will not cause the engagement to terminate."

"I can't help it," replied William. "The engagement ought not to terminate. It was sacredly entered into: and, without sufficient reason, it ought to be as sacredly kept."

"You are a living representation of folly," cried Sir Richard. "Sufficient reason! There's sufficient reason for breaking off fifty engagements. Can you not see the matter in its proper light?"

"That is what I do see," replied William, sadly. "I see that the engagement ought to be maintained. For my own part, I never can go to Mary and tell her that I am to give her up."

"Coward," said Sir Richard, with a frown. "Then I must do so."

"I fear you are right," returned William. "I am a coward, or little better. It is cowardly to break off this alliance—the world will call it by a very different name. Father," he added, appealingly, "is my happiness nothing to you? Can you sacrifice us both to your pride and vain-glory?"

"You will see it very differently some day," returned Sir Richard. "When you have lived in the world as long as I have, you will laugh at yourself for these ridiculously romantic ideas. Instead of marring your happiness, I am making it. Substantially, too."

"I think, sir, said Mr. Blake-Gordon, not liking the tone, "that you might leave me to be the judge of what is best for my own happiness."

"There you are mistaken, my dear William. You have a young head on your shoulders: you see things à tort et à travers, as the French say. The engagement with Peter Castlemaine's daughter would never have received my sanction but for her wealth. We are poor, and it is essential that you should marry a large fortune, if you marry at all. That wealth of hers has now melted, and consequently the contract is at an end. This is the common-sense view of the circumstances which the world will take. Done it must be, William. Shall I see the young lady for you? or will you be a man and see her for yourself?"

But before Mr. Blake-Gordon had time to reply, a note was brought in. It was the one written by Miss Castlemaine; and it could not have arrived more seasonably for Sir Richard's views. The young man opened it; read it to the end: and passed it to his father in silence.

"A very sensible girl, upon my word," exclaimed Sir Richard, when he had mastered the contents by the aid of a double eye-glass. "She sees things in their right light. Castlemaine was, after all, an extremely honourable man, and instilled proper notions into her. This greatly facilitates matters, William. Our path is now smoothed for us. I will myself write to her. You can do the same, if you are so disposed. Had this only come before, what arguments it might have saved!"

Upon which the baronet sat down, and indited the following epistle:—

"My dear young Lady,

"Your note—which my son has handed to me—has given me in one sense a degree of pleasure; for I perceive in it traces of good sense and judgment, such as women do not always possess.

"You are right in supposing that under the present aspect of affairs a marriage between yourself and my son would be unadvised." (She had supposed nothing of the sort, but it suited him to assume it.) "And therefore I concur with you in your opinion that the engagement should terminate.

"Deeply though I regret this personally, I have yet felt it my duty to insist upon it to my son: not only for his sake, but for

your own. The very small income I am able to spare him renders it impossible for him to take a portionless wife, and I could never sanction a step that would drag him down to poverty and embarrassment. I was about to write to you, or to see you, to tell you this, for William shrank from the task, and your note has agreeably simplified what had to be done. We cordially, though reluctantly, agree to what you have had the good feeling to propose.

"At all times I shall be delighted to hear of your welfare and happiness; and, believe, dear Miss Castlemaine, that you have not a more sincere well-wisher than your devoted friend and servant,

"RICHARD BLAKE-GORDON."

With much inward satisfaction the baronet folded the letter. He was wise enough not to show it to his son; who, honourable in thought and feeling as he was weak in nature, might have been prompted to tear it into shreds, and declare that come good or ill, he would be true to his plighted word.

"There!" said Sir Richard, with a growl of relief, as he affixed his seal, "I have accomplished that task for you, William. As I said before, write to her yourself if you will, but be quick about it. In half-an-hour I shall send back my answer."

"Give me that time to myself," said William, rising to leave the room. "If I have anything to say I will write it."

At the end of the half-hour he had written the following words; and the note was despatched with his father's:—

"MY DARLING,

"I suppose we must separate; but all happiness for me is over in this world. You will, however, accord me a final interview; a moment for explanation; I cannot part without that. I will be with you this afternoon at four o'clock.

"In spite of all,

"I am for ever yours—and yours only,

"WILLIAM."

Unlike his father's letter, there was no hypocrisy in this, no mere form of words. When he wrote that all happiness for

him was over, he meant it; and he wrote truly. Perhaps he deserved no less: but, if he merited blame, judgment might accord him some pity with it.

When Mary received the letters, she felt certain of their contents before a word was seen. Sir Richard would not himself have written except to break off the engagement. He had not even called upon her in all these long weary days of desolation and misery: and there could be only one motive for this unkind neglect. His note would now explain it.

But when she read its contents: its hypocrisy, its plausible argument, its profession of friendship and devotion; the pang of the death-blow gave place to the highest anger and indignation.

At that moment of bitterness the letter sounded to her desperately hollow and cruel, worse perhaps than it even was. The pain was more than her wounded spirit—so tried in the past few weeks—could bear; and with a brief but violent storm of sobs, with which no tears came, she tore the letter in two and threw it into the fire.

"At least he might have done it differently," she said to herself in her anguish. "He might have written in a manner that would have made me feel it less."

It was one of her first lessons in the world's harshness, in the selfish nature of man. Happy for her if in her altered circumstances she had not many such to learn!

Presently, when she had grown a little calm, she opened the other note, almost wondering whether it would be a repetition of the cool falsity of Sir Richard's. Ah no!

"I will see him," she said, when she had read the few words. "But the interview shall be brief. Of what use to prolong the agony?" So when William Blake-Gordon, true to his appointment, reached the bank at four o'clock, he was admitted.

How different an aspect the house presented from that of the days gone by! A stillness as of death reigned. Rooms that had echoed with merry voices and light footsteps above, with the ring of gold and the tones of busy men below, were now silent and deserted. No change had yet been made in the household arrangements, but that was soon to come. The servants would be discharged, the costly furniture was already

marked for the hammer; Mrs. Webb must leave, and—what was to be the course of Miss Castlemaine. She had not even asked herself the question, whilst the engagement with Mr. Blake-Gordon remained officially unbroken.

The butler opened the door to him and ushered him into the drawing-room. Mary came forward to greet him with her pale, sad face—a face that startled her lover. He clasped her to him, and she burst into sobs and tears. There are moments of anguish when pride gives way.

"Oh, my darling!" he cried, scarcely less agitated than herself, "this cruel decision is killing you! Why did you write that letter?—why did you not remain firm?—and insist on our engagement being fulfilled?"

Never had his weak nature more betrayed itself than then. "Why did not *she* insist?"—as if conscious that he was powerless to do so! She felt it keenly: felt that in this, at least, a gulf lay between them.

"What I have done is for the best," she said, gently disengaging herself, and suppressing the signs of her sorrow, as she motioned him to a seat. "In my altered circumstances I felt—at least I feared—that no happiness could attend our marriage. Your father, in the first place, would never have given his consent."

"There are times when duty to a father should give place to duty to one's self," he returned, forgetting how singularly this argument was negatived by his own conduct. "All my happiness in life is over."

"As you wrote to me," she said. "But by-and-by, when you have forgotten all this, William, and time has brought things round, you will meet with some one who will be able to make you happy: perhaps as much so as I should have done: and you will look back on these days as a dream."

"And you?" he asked, with a stifled groan of remorse.

"I?" she returned, with a smile, half sad, half derisive. "I am nobody now. You have a place to fill in the world; I shall soon be heard of no more."

"But where are you going to live, Mary? You have nothing left out of the wreck."

"I have a little. Enough for my future wants. At present I shall go on a visit to Greylands' Rest. My uncle urges it,

and he is my father's nearest representative. Depend upon it, I shall meet with some occupation in life that will make me contented, if not happy."

"Until you marry," he said. "Marry some man more noble than I; more worthy of you."

For a moment she looked steadily at him, and then her face flushed with pain. But she would not contradict it. She began to think that she had never quite understood the nature of William Blake-Gordon.

"In the future, you and I will probably not meet often, William; if at all," she resumed. "But you will carry with you my best wishes, and I shall always rejoice to hear of your happiness and prosperity. The past we must, both of us, try to forget."

"I shall never forget it," was the impulsive answer.

"Do you remember my dream?" she sadly asked. "The one I told you about the night of the ball. How strangely it is being fulfilled!"

He stood up, feeling how miserable it all was, feeling his own littleness. For a short time longer they talked together: but Mary wished the interview over.

When it came to the actual parting she very nearly broke down. It was very hard and bitter. Her life had not so long ago promised to be so bright! Now all was ended. As to marriage—never for her: of that sort of happiness the future contained none. Calmness, patience in suffering, resignation, and in time even contentment, she might find in some path of duty; but beyond that, nothing.

They stood together, her hands in his, their hearts aching with pain, each to the other, with that sad yearning that is born of utter hopelessness. A parting like this seems to be more cruel than death.

"Come what may, Mary, I shall love you, and you alone, to the end. You tell me I shall marry: it may be so; I know not: but, if so, my wife, whomsoever she may be, will never have my love; never, never. We do not love twice in a lifetime. And, if those who have loved on earth are permitted to meet in heaven, you and I, my best and dearest, shall assuredly find together in Eternity the happiness denied us here."

She was but mortal, after all; and the words sent a strange

thrill of pleasure through her heart. Oh no! he would never love another as he had loved her; she knew it: and it might be—it might be—that they should recognise each other in the bliss of a never-ending hereafter!

And so they parted.

That evening, as Miss Castlemaine was sitting alone, musing on the past, the present, and the future, nursing her misery and her desolation, the door opened and Thomas Hill was shown in. She had seen more of him than of any one else, excepting Mrs. Webb, since the ruin.

"Miss Mary," said he, when they had shaken hands, "I have come to ask you whether the report can be true?"

"What report?" inquired Mary: but a suspicion of what he must mean rushed over her, ere the words had well passed her lips.

"Perhaps it is hardly a report," said the clerk, correcting himself; "for I doubt if any one else knows of it. I met Sir Richard to-day," he continued, his tone full of indignant commiseration; "and in answer to some remark I made about your marriage, he said the marriage was not to take place; it was at an end. I did not believe him."

"It is quite true," replied Mary, with difficulty controlling her voice. "I am glad that it is at an end."

"Glad?" he repeated, looking into her face with his kindly old eyes.

"Yes. It is much better so. Sir Richard, in the altered state of my fortunes, would never think me a sufficiently good match for his son."

"But the dishonour, Miss Mary! And your happiness? Is that not to be thought of?"

"All things that are wrong will right themselves," she replied, with a quiet smile. "At least, Sir Richard thinks so."

"And Mr. Blake-Gordon, is he willing to submit quietly to the separation? Pardon me, Miss Mary. If your father were alive, I should know my place too well to say a word on the subject: but—I seem to have been drawn very closely to you since that time of desolation, and my heart resents all slight on you as *he* would have resented it. I could not rest until I knew the truth."

"Say no more about it," breathed Mary. "Let the topic lie

between us as one that never had existence. It will be for my happiness."

"But can nothing be done?" persisted Thomas Hill. "Should not your uncle go and expostulate with them and expose their villainy—for I can call it by no other name?"

"Not for worlds," she said, hastily. "It is I who have broken the engagement, Mr. Hill; not they. I wrote this morning and restored to Mr. Blake-Gordon his freedom: this afternoon I bade him farewell for ever. It is all over and done with: never mention it again to me."

"And you—what are your plans for the future? Where shall you live?"

"I cannot yet tell where. I am poor, you know," she added, with one of her sweet, sad smiles. "For the present I am going on a visit to my uncle James."

"Greylands' Rest would be your most suitable home now," spoke Thomas Hill, slowly and dubiously. "But—I don't *know* that you would like it. Mrs. Castlemaine——"

He stopped, hardly liking to say what was in his mind—that Mrs. Castlemaine was not the most desirable of women to live with. Mary understood him.

"Only on a visit," she said. "Whilst there, I shall have leisure to think of the future. My hundred and fifty pounds a-year—and so much you all say will be secured to me——"

"And the whole of what I possess, Miss Mary."

"My hundred and fifty pounds a-year will seem a sufficient income to me, when I have brought my mind down from its heights," she continued, with another faint smile, as though unmindful of the interruption. "Trust me, my dear old friend, the future shall not be as gloomy as, by the expression of your face, you seem to anticipate. I am not weak enough to throw away my life in repining, and in wishing for what Heaven sees fit to deny me."

"Heaven?" he repeated in accents of reproof.

"Let us say circumstances, then. But in the very worst fate, it may be that Heaven's hand is working—over-ruling all for our future good. My life can still be a useful one; and I, if not happy, at least may be contented."

But that night, in the solitude of her chamber, she opened a small box, containing nothing but a few faded white rose-leaves

It was the first trembling offering William Blake-Gordon had given her, long before he dared to tell of his love. Before they were again put away out of sight, tears, bitter as any shed in her whole life, had fallen upon them.

CHAPTER XI.

WITHIN THE NUNNERY.

THE time had gone on at Greylands; and the disappearance of Anthony Castlemaine was an event of the past. Not the slightest evidence had arisen to tell how he had disappeared: but an uneasy suspicion of Mr. Castlemaine still lurked in corners. John Bent had been the chief instigator in this. As truly as he believed the sun shone in the heavens, so did he believe that Anthony Castlemaine had been put out of the way by his uncle; sent out of the world, in fact, that the young man might not imperil his possession of Greylands' Rest. He did not say in so many words that Mr. Castlemaine had killed his nephew; that might not have been prudent; but his conviction could not be mistaken; and when alone with his wife he did not scruple to talk freely. All Greylands did not share in the opinion. The superstitious villagers attributed the disappearance to be due in some manner to the spirit of the Grey Monk, haunting the Friar's Keep. The fears of the place were augmented tenfold. Not one would go at night in sight of it, except on the greatest compulsion; and Commodore Teague (a fearless man, as was proved by his living so near the grim building alone) had whispered that the Grey Friar was abroad again with his lamp, for he had twice seen him glide past the casements. What with one fear and another, Greylands was not altogether in a state of calmness.

Mary Ursula had come to Greylands' Rest. The once happy home at Stilborough was given up, and the affairs of the bank were virtually settled. A sufficient sum had been saved from the wreck to bring her in about a hundred and fifty pounds a-year; that income was secured to her for life and would be at her disposal at death. All claims were being paid in full; liberal presents were given to the clerks and servants thrown

suddenly out of employment; and not a reproach, or shadow of reproach, could be cast on the house of Castlemaine.

Before Mary had been a week at Greylands' Rest, she was mentally forming her plans for leaving it. Mr. Castlemaine would fain have kept her there: he was fond and proud of her; he thought there was no other woman like her in the world. Not so Mrs. Castlemaine. She resented her husband's love and reverence for his niece; and, small-minded, full of spite, she was actually jealous of her. She had always felt a jealousy of the banker's daughter, living in her luxurious home at Stilborough; she had a shrewd idea that she herself, with her little tempers, and her petty frivolities, was sometimes compared unfavourably with Mary Ursula by her husband, wife though she was; and she had far rather some disagreeable animal had taken up its abode at Greylands' Rest for good, than this noble and beautiful girl. Now and again even in those first few days, she contrived to betray this feeling: and it may be that this helped to hasten Mary's plans. Flora, too, was a perpetual source of annoyance to every one but her mother; and the young lady was as rude to Miss Castlemaine as to other people.

Since her parting with Mr. Blake-Gordon, an idea had dawned upon and was taking root in Mary Ursula's mind. It was, that she should join the sisterhood of the Grey Ladies. The more she dwelt upon it, the greater grew her conviction that it would be the very life now suited to her. Unlike Mr. Castlemaine, she had always held the sisters in reverence. They were self-denying; they led a useful life before Heaven; they were of no account in the world: what better career could she propose, or wish, for herself, now that nearer and dearer ties were denied her? And she formed her resolution: though she almost dreaded to declare it to her uncle.

Mr. Castlemaine stood one morning at the window of his study, looking out on the whitened landscape, for snow covered the ground. The genial weather that came in so early had given place to winter again: not often is spring so changeable as it had been that year. The sad, worn look that had been seen lately on the Master of Greylands' face, though rarely in company, sat on it now. He pushed his dark hair from his brow with a hasty hand, as some thought, worse than the rest,

disturbed him, and a heavy groan escaped his lips. At that moment some one knocked at the study-door.

He strode across the room with a frown to open it. It was an understood thing in the house that this room was sacred to its master. There stood Mary, in her deep mourning.

"I have ventured to come to you here, Uncle James," she said, "as I wish to speak with you alone. Can you spare me a few minutes?"

"Any number to you, Mary. And remember, my dear, that *you* are always welcome here."

He gave her a chair, shut down his bureau and locked it, and took a seat himself. For a moment she paused, and then began in some hesitation.

"Uncle James, I have been forming my plans."

"Your plans?" he echoed.

"And I have come to tell them to you before I tell any one else."

"Well?" said Mr. Castlemaine, wondering what was coming.

"I—I must have some occupation in life, you know?"

"Well?"

"And I have not been long in making up my mind what it shall be. I shall join the Sisterhood."

"Join the what?"

"The Sisters at the Grey Nunnery, Uncle James."

Mr. Castlemaine pushed back his chair in angry astonishment when he fully took in the sense of the words. "The Sisters at the Grey Nunnery!" he cried indignantly. "Join those women who lead such an idle, gossiping, meddling life, that I lose patience when I think of them! Never shall you do that, Mary Ursula!"

"It seems to me that you have always mistaken them, uncle," she said; "have done them wrong in your heart. They are noble women, and are leading a noble life——"

"A petty, obscure life," he interrupted.

"It is obscure; but in its usefulness and self-sacrifice it must be noble. What would Greylands be without their care?"

"A great deal better than with it."

"They help the poor, they nurse the sick, they teach the children; they try to make the fishermen think a little of God. Who would do it if they were not here, uncle? Do you

know, I have thought so much of it in the past few days that I quite long to join them."

"This is utter folly!" cried Mr. Castlemaine; and he had never felt so inclined to be angry with his niece. "To join this meddling Sisterhood would be to sacrifice all your future prospects in life."

"I have no prospects to sacrifice," returned Mary. "You know that, Uncle James."

"No prospects? Nonsense! Because that dishonourable rascal, William Blake-Gordon, has chosen to forfeit his engagement, and make himself a by-word in the mouths of men, are you to renounce the world? Many a better gentleman than he, my dear, will be seeking you before a few months have gone by."

"I shall never marry," was her firm answer. "Never. Whether I joined the Sisters, or not; whether I retired from the world, or mixed to my dying day in all its pomps and gaieties; still I should never marry. So you see, Uncle James, I have now to make my future, and to create for myself an object in life."

"Well, we will leave the question of marriage. Meanwhile your present home must be with me, Mary Ursula. I cannot spare you. I should like you to make up your mind to remain in it always, unless other and nearer ties shall call you forth."

"You are very kind, Uncle James; you have always been kind. But I—I must be independent," she added, with a smile and a slight flush. "Forgive the seeming ingratitude."

"Very independent you would be, if you joined those women!"

"In one sense I should be thoroughly independent. My income will be most welcome to them, for they are, as you know, very poor——"

"*Your* income!" he interrupted. "I wish—I *wish*, Mary—you would allow me to augment it!"

"And I shall be close to Greylands' Rest," she continued, with a slight shake of the head, for this proposal to settle money upon her had become quite a vexatious question. "I shall be able to come here to see you often."

"Mary Ursula, I will hear no more of this," he cried, quite passionately. "You shall never do it with my consent,"

She rose and laid her pleading hands upon his. "Uncle, pardon me, but my mind is made up. I have not decided hastily, or without due consideration. Day and night I have dwelt upon it. I have *prayed* over it, uncle—and I plainly see it is the best thing for me. I would sooner spend my days there than anywhere, because I shall be near you."

"And I want you to be near me. But not in a nunnery."

"It is not a nunnery now, you know, Uncle James, though the building happens still to bear the name. If I take up my abode there, I take no vows, remember. I do not renounce the world. Should any necessity arise—though I think it will not do so—for me to resume my place in society, I am at full liberty to put off my grey gown and bonnet and return to it."

"What do you think your father would have said to this, Mary Ursula?"

"Were my father alive, Uncle James, the question never could have arisen; my place would have been with him. But I think—if he could see me now under these altered circumstances—I think he would say to me Go."

There was no turning her. James Castlemaine saw it: and when she quitted the room he felt that the step, unless some special hindrance intervened, would be carried out.

"The result of being clever enough to have opinions of one's own!" muttered Mr. Castlemaine, in reference to the, to him, most unwelcome project.

Turning to the window again, he stood there, looking out. Looking out, but seeing nothing. The Friar's Keep opposite, rising dark and grim in contrast with the white landscape; the sparkling sea beyond, glittering in the frosty sunshine: he saw none of it. The snow must be blinding his sight, or some deep trouble his senses. Mr. Castlemaine had other motives than the world knew of for wishing to keep his niece out of the Grey Nunnery: but he did not see how it was to be done.

Mary Ursula had passed into her own chamber: the best room in the house, and luxuriously furnished. It was generally kept for distinguished guests; and Mrs. Castlemaine had thought a plainer one might have served their relative; but, as she muttered resentfully to the empty air, if Mr. Castlemaine could load the banker's daughter with gold and precious stones, he would go out of his way to do it.

Drawing her chair to the fire, Mary sat down and thought out her plan. The longer she dwelt upon it, the more she felt convinced that she was right in adopting it. A few short weeks before, and had any one told her she would enter the Nunnery and become one of the Grey Sisters, she had started back in aversion. But ideas and views change with circumstances. Then she possessed a happy home of splendour, an indulgent father, riches that seemed unbounded, the smiles of the gay world, and a lover to whom she was shortly to be united. Now she had none of these: all had been wrested from her at one fell swoop. To the outward world she had seemed to take her misfortunes calmly: but none knew how they had wrung her very soul. It had seemed to her that her heart was broken: it seemed as though some retired and quiet place to rest in were absolutely needful while she recovered, if she ever did recover, from the effects of these calamities. But she did not want to sit down under her grief and brood upon it: she had prayed earnestly, and still prayed, that it would please Heaven to enable her to find consolation in her future life; that it might be one of usefulness to others, as it could not be one of happiness to herself. But a latent prevision sometimes made itself apparent, that happiness would come to her; that in persevering in earnestly formed plans, she should eventually find it.

"The sooner I enter upon my work the better," she said, rising and shaking out the crape folds of her black silk dress. "And there's nothing more to wait for, now that I have broken it to my uncle."

Glancing at her own face as she passed a mirror, she halted to look at the change that trouble had made there. Others might not notice it, but to herself it was very perceptible. The beautiful features were thinner than of yore, the cheeks wore a fainter rose-colour; her stately form had lost somewhat of its roundness. Ah, it was not her own sorrow that had chiefly told upon Mary Castlemaine; it was the sudden death of her father, and the agonizing doubt attending it.

"If I could only know that it was God's will that he should die!" she exclaimed, raising her hands in an attitude of supplication. "And then that other dreadful trouble—that awful doubt—about poor Anthony!"

Descending the stairs, she opened the door of the red room,

and entered on a scene of turbulence. Miss Flora was in one of her most spiteful and provoking humours, and Ethel was holding her at arms' length. Her pretty face was inflamed, her pretty hair hung wild—and Flora's face and hair were both as pretty as they could well be.

"Flora!" said Miss Castlemaine, advancing to the rescue. "Flora, for shame! Unless I had seen you in this passion, I would not have believed it."

"I *will* kick her, then! It's through her I did not go with mamma in the carriage to Stilborough."

"It was mamma who would not take you," said Ethel. "She said she had some private business there, and did not want you with her."

"She would have taken me: you know she would; but for your telling her I had not done my French exercise, you nasty, spiteful thing."

"Mamma asked me whether you had done it, and I said no."

'And you ought to have said yes! You ill-natured, wicked, interfering dromedary!"

"Be still, Flora," interposed Miss Castlemaine. "Unless you are so, I will call your papa. How can you so far forget yourself?"

"*You* have no business to interfere, Mary Ursula! The house is not yours; you are only staying in it."

"True," said Miss Castlemaine, calmly. "And I shall not be in it very much longer, Flora. I am soon going away."

"I shall be glad of that," retorted the rude child; "and I am sure mamma will be. She says it is a shame that you should take up the best bedroom."

"Oh, Flora!" interposed Ethel.

"And she says——"

What further revelations the damsel might be contemplating, in regard to her mother, were summarily cut short. Harry Castlemaine had entered in time to hear what she was saying, and he quietly lifted her from the room. Outside, he treated her to what she dreaded, though it was not often she received it from him—a severe shaking—and she ran away howling.

"She is being ruined," said Harry. "Mrs. Castlemaine never corrects her, or allows her to be corrected. I wish my father would take it seriously in hand! She ought to be at school."

Peace restored, Mary told them what she had just been telling Mr. Castlemaine. She was about to become a Grey Sister. Harry laughed: he did not believe a syllable of it; Ethel, more clear-sighted, burst into tears.

"Don't leave us!" she whispered, clinging to Mary in her surprise and distress. "You see what my life is here! I am without love or sympathy. I have only my books and music, my drawings and the sea! but for them my heart would break. Oh, Mary; it has been so different since you came."

Mary Ursula put her arm round Ethel. She herself standing so much in need of love, had felt the tender affection of this fresh young girl, already entwining itself about her heart, as the grateful tree the tendrils of the clinging vine.

"You will be my chief regret in leaving Greylands' Rest, Ethel. But, my dear, we can often meet. You can see me at the Nunnery when you will; and I shall come here sometimes."

"Mary Ursula," said Harry, all his lightness checked, "sooner than you should go to that old Nunnery, I'll set it on fire."

"No, you will not, Harry."

"I will. The crazy old building won't be much loss to the place, and the ruins would be picturesque. But you do not really mean this?"

The grave look of her earnest face effectually answered him.

"It is I who will miss you," bewailed Ethel. "Can nothing be done?"

"Nothing," said Mary, smiling. "Our paths in life, Ethel, will probably lie far apart. You will marry, and form social ties. I——" she broke off suddenly.

"I intend to marry Ethel myself," said Harry, throwing back a cinder that flew out upon the hearth.

"Be quiet, Harry," said Ethel.

"You know it's true," he returned, without looking at her.

"True! When we are like brother and sister!"

Miss Castlemaine glanced from one to the other. She did not know how to take this. That Harry liked Ethel and was in the habit of paying her attention, went for nothing; for he did the same by many other young ladies.

"It was only last week I asked her to name the day," said Harry.

"And I told you to go and talk nonsense elsewhere; not to me," retorted Ethel, her tone betraying her vexation.

"If you won't have me, Ethel, you'll drive me to desperation. I might go off and marry one of the Grey Sisters in revenge. It should be Sister Ann. She is a charming picture; one to take a young man's heart by storm."

Mary Ursula looked keenly at him. In all this there was a semblance of something not real. It struck her that he *wished to make it appear* he wanted Ethel, when in fact he did not do so:

"Harry," she cried, speaking impulsively, "you have not, I hope, been falling in love with any undesirable person?"

"But I have," said Harry, his face flushing. "Don't I tell you it is Sister Ann! Mark you though, cousin mine, *you* shall never be allowed to make one of those Grey Sisters."

"You are very random, you know, Harry," said Miss Castlemaine, slowly. "You talk to young ladies without meaning anything—but they may not detect that. Take care you do not go too far some day, and find yourself in a mesh."

Harry Castlemaine turned his bright face on his cousin. "I never talk seriously except to one person, Mary Ursula. And that's Ethel."

"Harry," cried the young girl, with flashing eyes, "you are not fair to me."

"And now, have you any commands for the Commodore?" went on Harry lightly, taking no notice of Ethel's rebuke. "I am going to the Hutt."

They said they had none; and he left the room. Mary turned to Ethel.

"My dear—if you have no objection to confide in me—*is* there anything between you and Harry?"

"Nothing," answered Ethel, blushing with girlish modesty. "Last year he teased me very much, making me often angry; but lately he has been better. The idea of my marrying him! I like Harry very much indeed as a brother; but as to marrying him, why, I would rather never be married at all. Here's the carriage coming back! Mamma must have forgotten something."

Mrs. Castlemaine's carriage was seen winding round the

drive. They heard her alight at the door and hold a colloquy with Flora. She came to the red room looking angry.

"Where's Harry?" she demanded, in the sharp, unkindly tones that so often grated on the ears of those offending her, as she threw her eyes round the room.

"Harry is not here, mamma," replied Ethel.

"I understood he was here," suspiciously spoke Mrs. Castlemaine.

"He went out a minute or two ago," said Ethel. "I think he has gone to Commodore Teague's."

"He is just like an eel," was the pettish rejoinder. "You never know when you have him. As to that vulgar, gossiping old Commodore, that they make so much of and are always running after, I can't imagine what they see in him."

"Perhaps it is his gossip they like," suggested Ethel.

"Well, I want Harry. He has been beating Flora."

"I don't think he beat her, mamma."

"Oh, you great story-teller!" exclaimed Flora, putting her head in. "He shook me till all my bones rattled."

Mrs. Castlemaine closed the door sharply. And the next thing they saw was Miss Flora dressed in her best and going off with her mother.

"With this treatment the child has hardly a chance of becoming better," murmured Mary Ursula. "Ethel, are you inclined for a walk?"

"Yes: with you."

They dressed and started for the village, walking lightly over the crisp snow, under the clear blue sky. Miss Castlemaine was bound for the Grey Nunnery; Ethel, protesting she would take no act or part towards helping her to enter it, went off to see some of the fishermen's wives on the cliff.

Passing through the outer gate, Mary Ursula rang the bell, and was admitted by Sister Phœby. A narrow passage led her into the hall. Opening from it on the left hand was a moderately sized room, plain and comfortable. It was called the reception-parlour, but was the one the Grey Ladies usually sat in: in fact, they had no other sitting-room that could be called decently furnished. Dinner was taken in a bare, bleak room looking towards the sea; it was used also as the school-room, and contained little more than a large table and some

forms. Miss Castlemaine was shown into the reception-parlour. Two of the ladies were in it: Sister Margaret writing, Sister Betsy making lint.

An indication of Miss Castlemaine's wish to join the Sisters had already reached the Nunnery, and they knew not how to make enough of her. It had caused quite a commotion of delight. To number a Castlemaine amongst them, especially one so much esteemed, so grand and good as the banker's daughter, was an honour hardly to be credited; the small fortune she would bring seemed riches to them; and they coveted the companionship of the sweet and gentle lady for their own sakes. Her joining them would swell the number of the community to thirteen; but no reason existed against that.

Sister Margaret put down her pen, Sister Betsy her linen, as their visitor entered. They gave her the one arm-chair by the fire, and Mary put back her crape veil as she sat down. Calm and good looked the ladies in their simple grey gowns, their hair smoothly braided under the white cap of worked muslin; and Mary Ursula seemed to feel a foretaste of peace in the time when the same dress, the same serene life, would be hers. The Lady Sisters came flocking in on hearing she was there; all were present excepting Sister Mildred: Margaret, Charlotte, Betsy, Grizzel, and Mona. The working Sisters were Phœby, Ann, Rachel, Caroline, Lettice, and Ruth.

The ladies hastened to tell Miss Castlemaine of a hope they had been entertaining—namely, that when she joined the community, she would become its head. Sister Mildred, incapacitated by her tedious illness, had long wished to resign control; and would have done so before, but that Sister Margaret, on whom it ought to descend, declined to take it. Miss Castlemaine sat in doubt: the proposal came upon her with surprise.

"I do all the writing, and keep the accounts; and that's all I'm good for," said Sister Margaret to Miss Castlemaine, confidentially. "If I were put in Sister Mildred's place, and had to order this and decide that, I should be lost."

"Sister Mildred may regain her health," observed Miss Castlemaine.

"But never her hearing," put in Sister Grizzel, a quick, fresh-coloured, talkative little woman. "And that tells very

much against her as Lady Superior. In fact, her continuing so is quite a farce."

"Besides, she herself wants to give it up," said Sister Charlotte. "Oh, Miss Castlemaine, if you would only accept it in her place! You would make us so happy."

Mary Ursula said she must take time for consideration. She was invited to go up to Sister Mildred, who would feel slighted if she did not do so. So she was conducted upstairs by the ladies, Charlotte and Mona, and found herself in a long, dark, narrow corridor, which had doors on either side—the nuns' cells of old. The Head Sister's room was at the extreme end—a neat little chamber, with a casement looking out on the sea, and a small bed in the corner. Sister Mildred was dressed and sat by the fire. She was a fair, pleasant-looking, talkative woman, slightly deformed, and past fifty, but still very light and active. Of her own accord, she introduced the subject of resigning her post to Miss Castlemaine, and pressed her urgently to take it.

"It has become a trouble to me, my dear," she said. "Instead of lying here at peace with nothing to think about—and some days I can't get up at all—I am perpetually being referred to. Sister Margaret refuses to take it. As to Sister Charlotte, she is always with the little ones in school; she likes teaching. And so there it is. Your taking it would solve the difficulty; and we could hardly have one bearing the honoured name of Castlemaine amongst us, and not place her at our head."

Mary stood at the window. The grand expanse of sea lay below and around. An Indiaman was sailing majestically in the distance; on the sails of one of the fishing-boats nearer shore, some frosted snow had gathered and was sparkling in the sunshine. She stood there, reflecting.

"For the sake of constantly enjoying this wonderful scene, it would be almost worth while to come, setting aside other inducements!" she mentally exclaimed, in her enthusiasm. "As to yielding to their wish of taking the lead, I believe it is what I should like, and am fitted for."

And when she quitted Sister Mildred's room she left a promise of acceptance within it.

Meanwhile an unpleasant adventure had just happened to

Ethel. Her visits to the wives of the fishermen on the cliff concluded, and seeing no sign of Mary Ursula's leaving the Nunnery, she thought she would make a call on Mrs. Bent, and wait there: which, in truth, she was rather fond of doing. But to-day she arrived at an inopportune moment. Mr. and Mrs. Bent were enjoying a dispute.

It appeared that a letter had been delivered at the inn that morning, addressed to Anthony Castlemaine: the third letter that had come for him since his disappearance. The two first bore the post-mark of Gap, this one the London post-mark, and all were addressed in the same handwriting. Mrs. Bent had urged her husband to hand over the others to the Master of Greylands: she was now urging the same as to this one. John Bent, though in most matters under his wife's finger and thumb, had refused to listen to her in this: he should keep the letters in his own safe custody, he said, until the writer, or some one of Mr. Anthony's connections from over the water, appeared to claim them. Mrs. Bent was unable to shake his decision: since the fatal night connected with the Friar's Keep, she noticed that John had altered. He was more silent than of old; yielded to her less, and maintained his own will better: which was, of course, not an agreeable change to Mrs. Bent.

They were in their ordinary room, facing the sea. The door was open as usual, but a screen now stood between the fireplace and the draught. John sat in his carved elbow-chair; Mrs. Bent stood, folding clothes at the table; which was drawn up near the fire.

"I tell you, John Bent, you might be taken up and prosecuted for it," she said, sprinkling the linen vigorously. "Keeping other people's letters!"

"The letters are directed to my house, Dorothy woman; and I shall keep them till some proper person turns up to receive them," was John's answer, calmly delivered.

"The proper person is Mr. Castlemaine. Just take your elbow away: you'll be upsetting the basin. He is the young man's uncle."

"Now, look here, wife. You've said that before, and once for all I tell you I won't do it. Mr. Castlemaine is the last person in the world I'd hand the letters to. What would he do with them?—Put 'em in the fire, I'll be bound. If, as I believe

from my very heart, Mr. Castlemaine took his nephew's life that night in the Friar's Keep—— "

"Hush!" said Mrs. Bent, the rosy colour on her face fading as a sound caught her ear. "Hush, man!"

And, for once, more alarmed than angry, she looked behind the screen, and found herself face to face with Ethel Reene.

"Mercy be good to us!" she exclaimed, seeing by the young lady's white face that they had been overheard. And, scarcely knowing what she did, she brought the horror-stricken girl round to the hearth, before John.

"Now you've done it!" she cried, turning upon him. "You'd better pack up and be off to jail: for if Miss Ethel tells the Master of Greylands what she has heard, he'll put you there."

"No, he won't," said John, full of contrition for the mischief he had done, but nevertheless determined not to eat his words, and believing the suspicion must have reached the young lady sooner or later.

"You cannot think this of papa!" said Ethel, sinking into a chair.

"Well, Miss Ethel, it is a great mystery, as you must know," said the landlord, who had risen. "I think the Master of Greylands could solve it if he liked."

"But—but, Mr. Bent, what you said is most dreadful!"

"I'm heartily sorry you chanced to overhear it, Miss Ethel. You've no cause to wink at me like that, wife. The words are said, and I cannot unsay them."

"But—do—you—believe it?" gasped Ethel.

"Yes, he does believe it," burst forth Mrs. Bent, losing sight of prudence in her anger against her husband. "If he does not get into some awful trouble one of these days through his tongue, his name's not John Bent. And there's Miss Castlemaine of Stilborough crossing the road!"

Not less overcome by dismay than Mrs. Bent was by anger, Ethel rushed out of the house and burst into tears. Mary Ursula, wondering much and full of concern, drew her arm within her own and went over to the little solitary bench that stood by the sea.

"Now, my dear, tell me what this means," she said, as they sat down.

But Ethel hesitated: it was not a thing to be told to Miss

Castlemaine. She stammered an incoherent word or two between her sobs, and at the best was indistinct.

"I understand, Ethel. Be calm. John Bent has been making a terrible charge against Uncle James."

Ethel clung to her. She admitted that it was so: telling how she had unintentionally overheard the conversation between the landlord and his wife. She said it had frightened and confused her, though she did not believe it.

"Neither do I believe it," returned Miss Castlemaine, calmly. "I heard this some time ago—I mean the suspicion that is rife in Greylands—but I am sorry that you should have been startled with it. That my uncle is incapable of anything of the kind—and only to have to say this seems a cruel insult on him—I am perfectly sure; and I am content to wait the elucidation that no doubt time will bring."

"But how wicked of John Bent!" cried Ethel.

"Ethel, I have gone through so much misery of late that it has *subdued* me, and I think I have learnt the great precept not to judge another," said Mary Ursula, sadly. "I do not blame John Bent. I respect him. That a strange mystery does encompass the doings of that February night—so fatal to me as well as to poor Anthony—I cannot ignore: and I speak now not of the disappearance only. There is reason in what John Bent says—Mr. Castlemaine is not open about it, and it might be fancied that he knows more than he will say. It is so. Perhaps he will not speak because it might implicate some one —not himself, Ethel; never himself; I do not fear that."

"No, no," murmured Ethel.

"It is Mr. Castlemaine's pride, I think, that prevents his speaking. He must have heard these rumours, and naturally resents them——"

"Do you think Anthony is really dead?" interrupted Ethel.

"I have never had any hope from the first. Now and then my imagination runs away with me and suggests he may be here, he may be there; but of real hope that he is alive I have none. Next to the death of my dear father, it has been the greatest weight I have had to bear. I saw him only once, Ethel, but I seemed to take to him as to a brother. I am sure he was honourable and generous, a good man and a gentleman."

"You know what they are foolish enough to say here?" breathed Ethel. "That the ghost of the Grey Friar, angry at its precincts being invaded——"

"Hush!" reproved Miss Castlemaine. "You and I know better than that, Ethel."

CHAPTER XII.

AN ARRIVAL AT THE DOLPHIN.

It was the afternoon of this same day. The stage-coach, delayed by the snow, was very late when it was heard approaching. Its four well-fed horses drew up at the Dolphin Inn to set down Mr. Nettleby. The superintendent of the coastguard, who had been on business a mile or two inland, had availed himself of the coach in returning. John Bent and his wife hastened to the door. The guard, hoping perhaps for a gratuity, descended from his seat and was helping the officer down from the roof, when he found himself called by a lady inside, who had been reconnoitring the inn and the flaming dolphin on its signboard.

"What place is this, guard?"

"Greylands, ma'am."

"That seems a good hotel."

"It is a nice comfortable inn, ma'am."

"I will get out here. Please see to my luggage."

The guard was surprised. He thought the lady could not have understood.

"This is Greylands, ma'am. You are booked to Stilborough."

"But I will descend here instead. See my poor child"—showing the hot face of a little girl who lay half-asleep upon her knee. "She has, I fear, the fever coming on, and she is so fatigued. This must be a healthy place; it has the sea, I perceive. We will rest here a day or two before going on."

The landlord and his wife had heard this colloquy, for the lady spoke at the open window. They advanced, and the guard threw wide the door.

"Will you carry my little one?" said the lady to Mrs. Bent.

"I fear she is going to be ill, and I do not care to take her on farther. Can I be accommodated with a good apartment here?"

"The best rooms we have, ma'am, are at your service; and you will find them excellent, though I say it myself," returned Mrs. Bent, receiving the child into her arms.

"Marie fatiguée," plaintively called out the little thing, who seemed about three years old. "Marie ne peut marcher."

The lady reassured her in the same language, and alighted. She was a tall, lady-like woman of apparently some six-and-twenty years, with soft, fair hair, and a pleasing face that betrayed signs of care, or weariness: or perhaps both. Mrs. Bent carried the child into the parlour; John followed with a large reticule made of plaited black-and-white straw, and the guard put two trunks in the passage, a large and a small one.

"I am en voyage," said the lady, addressing Mrs. Bent—and it may be remarked that, though speaking English fluently, and with very little accent, she now and then substituted a French word, or a whole sentence, as though in forgetfulness —of which John Bent and his wife did not understand a syllable. "But we have travelled far, and the crossing was frightfully rough, and I fear I have brought my little one on too quickly: so it may be well to halt here for a short time, and keep her quiet. I hope your hotel is not crowded?"

"There's nobody at all staying in it just now, ma'am," said Mrs. Bent. "We don't have many indoor visitors in the winter season."

"And this snow is not good," said the stranger. "I might have put off my journey had I thought it would come. When I left my home, the warm spring sun was shining, and the trees were budding."

"We have had fine warm weather here, too," said Mrs. Bent; "it changed again a week ago to winter: not but what the sun was bright enough to-day. This dear little thing seems delicate, ma'am."

"Not generally. But she is fatigued, you see, and has a touch of fever. We must make her some tisane."

"We'll soon get her right again," said Mrs. Bent, gently; for with children, of whom she was very fond, she lost all her

sharpness. "Poor lamb! And so you've come from over the water, ma'am!—and the sea was rough!—and did this little one suffer?"

"Oh, pray do not talk of that terrible sea! I thought I must have died. To look at, nothing more beautiful; but to be on it—ah, Ciel!"

She shuddered at the recollection. There was something peculiarly soft and winning in the quiet tones of her voice; something attractive altogether in her features and their sad expression.

"I never was on the sea, thank goodness," said Mrs. Bent; "I have heard it's very bad. We've plenty of it as far as the looks go: and that's enough for us, ma'am. Many an invitation I've had in my life to go sailing in people's boats—but no, not for me. One knows one's safe on land."

She had sat down, the child on her lap, and was taking off its blue woollen hood and warm fleecy grey pelisse. The frock underneath was of fine black French merino. The lady wore the same sort of black dress under her cloak: evidently both were in mourning. Happening to look up from the child, Mrs. Bent caught the traveller's eyes fixed attentively upon her, as if studying her face.

"How do you call this village, I was about to ask. Grey——"

"Greylands, ma'am. Stilborough is about three miles off. Are you going there?"

"Not to stay," said the lady, hastily. "I have come to England to see a relative, but my progress is not in any hurry. I must think first of my child: and this air seems good."

"None so good for miles and miles," returned Mrs. Bent. "A week of it will make this little lady quite another child. Pretty thing! What beautiful eyes!"

The child had awakened again in her restlessness; she was gazing up at her strange nurse with wide-open dark-brown eyes. They were not her mother's eyes, for those were blue. The hot little face was becoming paler.

"I must make her some tisane," repeated the lady; "or show you how to make it. You have herbs, I presume? We had better get her to bed. Nothing will do her so much good as rest and sleep."

"Will you take her, ma'am, for a few moments?" said Mrs.

Bent, placing her in the mother's arms. "I will see after your room and make it ready."

The landlady left the parlour. The child, feverish and weary, soon began to cry. Her mother hushed her; and presently, not waiting for the reappearance of the landlady, carried her upstairs.

Which was the chamber, she wondered, on reaching the landing: but a half-open door, and some stir within, guided her to it, as the right one. Mrs. Bent was bustling about; and the landlord, who appeared to have been taking up the trunks, stood just inside the room. Some sort of dispute seemed to be going on, for Mrs. Bent's tones were shrill. The lady halted, not liking to intrude, and sat down on a bench against the wall; the child, dozing again, was heavy to carry.

"As if there was not another room in the house, but you must make ready this one!" John was saying in remonstrance. "I told you, Dorothy, I wouldn't have this chamber used again until we had no room left elsewhere. What are you going to do with the things?"

"Now don't fret yourself to fiddle-strings," retorted Mrs. Bent. "I am putting all the things into this linen-basket; his clothes and his little desk and all; even the square of scented soap he used, for he brought it with him in his portmanteau. They shall go into the small chest in our bedroom, and be locked up. And you may put a seal upon it for safety."

"But I did not wish to have the things disturbed at all," urged John. "The lady might have had another room."

"The tap-room is your concern, the care of the chambers is mine, and I choose to give her this one," said independent Mrs. Bent. "As to keeping the best chamber out of use just because these things have remained in it unclaimed, it's about as daft a notion as ever I heard of. If you don't take care, John, you'll go crazy over Anthony Castlemaine."

The mother waiting outside, and hushing her child, had not been paying much attention: but at the last words she started, and gazed at the door. Her lips parted; her face turned white.

"Peace, wife," said the landlord. "What I say is right."

"Yes, crazy," persisted Mrs. Bent, who rarely dropped an argument of her own accord. "Look at what happened with

Miss Ethel Reene to-day! I'm sure you are not in your senses on the subject, John Bent, or you'd never be so imprudent. You may believe Mr. Anthony was murdered by his uncle, but it does not do to proclaim it publicly."

Oh, more deadly white than before did these words turn tho poor lady who was listening. Her face was as the face of one stricken with terror; she clasped her child closer, lest her trembling hands should let it fall. John Bent and his wife came forth, bearing the basket between them, a small mahogany desk just visible. She bent her face upon her child's and kept it there, as though she too had fallen asleep.

"Dear me, there's the lady!" whispered John.

"And it's unbeknown what *she* has overheard," muttered Mrs. Bent. "I beg your pardon, ma'am; you'll be cold sitting there. Had you dropped asleep?"

The lady lifted her white face: fortunately the passage was in gloom: and passed a handkerchief over her brow as she spoke.

"My little child grew so restless that I came up. Is the room ready?"

Leaving her husband to convey the basket to their chamber, Mrs. Bent took the child from the speaker's arms and preceded her into the room. A large, comfortable chamber, with a fine view over the sea, and a good fire burning in the grate.

"We were as quick as we could be," said Mrs. Bent, in apology for having kept her guest waiting; "but I had to empty the room first of some articles that were in it. I might have given you another room at once, ma'am, for we always keep them in readiness, you see; but this is the largest and has the pleasantest look-out; and I thought if the little girl was to be ill, you'd like it best."

"Articles belonging to a former traveller?" asked the lady, who was then kneeling before her trunk to get out her child's night-things.

"Yes, ma'am. A gentleman we had here a few short weeks ago."

"And he has left?"

"Oh yes," replied Mrs. Bent, gently combing back the child's soft brown hair, before she passed the sponge of warm water over her face.

"But why did he not take his things with him?"

"Well, ma'am, he—he left unexpectedly; and so they remained here."

Now, in making this somewhat evasive answer, Mrs. Bent had no particular wish to deceive. But, what with the work she had before her, and with the fretful child on her knee, it was not exactly the moment for gossiping. The disappearance of Anthony Castlemaine was too public and popular a theme in the neighbourhood for any idea of concealment to be connected with it. The lady, however, thought she meant to evade the subject, and said no more. Indeed, the child claimed all their attention.

"Marie soif," said the little one, as they put her into bed. "Maman, Marie soif."

"Always, always thirsty!" repeated the mother in English. "I don't much like it; it betrays fever."

"I'll bring some milk-and-water," said Mrs. Bent.

"No, no, not milk," interposed the lady. "A spoonful or two of sugar-and-water whilst I make some tisane. Madame has herbs, no doubt? I could make it myself at this fire if I had a little saucepan."

Mrs. Bent promised the herbs, for she had a store-room full of different sorts, and the saucepan. Moving noiselessly about the room, the lady happened to go near the window, and her eye caught the sea in the distance, on which some light yet lingered. Opening the casement for a moment, she put her head out, and gazed around.

"The sea is very nice to look at, but I don't like being on it," she said, as she closed the window. "What is that great building to the left?"

"That's the Grey Nunnery, ma'am."

"The Grey Nunnery! Have you a nunnery here in this little place? I had no idea."

"It's not a real nunnery," said Mrs. Bent, as she proceeded to explain what it was, and how good the ladies were who inhabited it. "We heard a bit of news about it this afternoon," she added, her propensity for talking creeping out. "Sister Ann ran over to borrow a baking-dish—for their own came in two in the oven with all the baked apples in it—and she said she believed Miss Castlemaine was going to join them as Lady Superior."

"Miss—who?" cried the stranger, quickly.

"Miss Castlemaine. Perhaps, ma'am, you may have heard of the Castlemaines of Greylands' Rest. It is close by."

"I do not know them," said the traveller. "Is, then, a Miss Castlemaine of Greylands' Rest the Lady Superior of the Nunnery?"

"Miss Castlemaine of Stilborough, ma'am. There is no Miss Castlemaine of Greylands' Rest; except a tiresome little chit of twelve. She has not joined them yet; it is only in contemplation. Sister Ann was all cock-a-hoop about it: but I told her the young lady was too beautiful to hide her head under a muslin cap in a nunnery."

"It is a grand old building," said the traveller, "and must stand out well on the edge of the cliff. And what a length! I cannot see the other end of it."

"The other end is nearly in ruins—part of it, at least. The chapel quite so. That lies between the Nunnery and the Friar's Keep."

"The Friar's Keep!" repeated the lady. "You have odd names here. But I like this village. It is quiet: no one seems to pass."

"There's hardly any one to pass, for that matter," cried Mrs. Bent, in disparagement. "Just the fishermen and the Grey Sisters. But here I am, talking when I ought to be doing! What would you like prepared for dinner, ma'am?"

"I could not eat—I feel feverish, too," was the answer, given in strangely sad tones. "I will take some tea and toast when I have made the tisane."

"And—what name—if I may ask, ma'am?" continued Mrs. Bent, as a final question.

"I am Madame Guise."

"Tea's best, after all, upon a day's travelling," was the landlady's summing up as she descended the stairs. There she told her husband that the lady had a curious name, which sounded like Madame Geese.

The small saucepan and the herbs were taken up by Molly, who said she was to stay and help make the stuff, if the lady required her. The lady seemed glad of her help, and showed her how to pick the dried leaves from the stalks.

"Do you have travellers staying here often?" asked Madame

Guise, standing near Molly after she had asked her name, and doing her own portion of the work.

"A'most never in winter time," replied Molly—a round-eyed, red-cheeked damsel, attired in a blue linsey skirt and a cotton handkerchief crossed at the neck. "We had a gentleman for a week or two just at the turn o' January. He had this here same bedroom."

"Those were his things, doubtless, that your mistress said she was removing to make room for me."

"In course they were," replied Molly. "Master said he'd not have this room used: but missis likes to take her own way. This here stalk, mum—is he too big to go in?"

"That is: we must have only the little ones. What was the gentleman's name, Molly?"

"He was young Mr. Castlemaine: a foreign gentleman, so to say: nephew to the one at Greylands' Rest. He came over here to put in his claim to the money and lands."

"And where did he go?—where is he now?" questioned Madame Guise, with an eagerness that might have betrayed her painful interest, had the servant's suspicions been on the alert.

"It's what my master would just give his head to know," was the answer. "He went into the Friar's Keep one moonlight night, and never came out again."

"Never came out again!" echoed Madame Guise. "What do you mean? How was that?"

Bit by bit Molly related the whole story, together with sundry items of the superstition attaching to the Friar's Keep. Very much gratified was she at the opportunity of doing it. The tale was encompassed by so many marvels, both of fact and imagination, by so much mystery, that others in Greylands, as well as Molly, thought it a red-letter day when they could find strange ears to listen to it.

Madame Guise sat down in a chair, her hands clasped before her, the herbs forgotten. Molly saw how pale she looked; and felt prouder than a peacock at her own powers of narration.

"But what became of him, Molly?" questioned the poor lady.

"Well, mum, that lies in doubt, you see. Some say he was spirited away by the Grey Monk."

Madame Guise shook her head. "That could not be," she

said slowly, and somewhat hesitatingly. "I don't like revenants myself—but that could not be."

"And others think," added Molly, dropping her voice, "that he was done away with by his uncle, Mr. Castlemaine. Master do, for one."

"Done away with! How?"

"Murdered," said the girl, plunging the herbs into the saucepan of water.

A shudder took Madame Guise from head to foot. Molly looked round at her: she was as one seized with ague.

"I am cold and fatigued with my long journey," she murmured. "And it always startles one to hear of murder."

"So it do, mum," acquiesced Molly. "I dun'no which is worst to hear tell on; murder or ghosts."

"But—this Friar's Keep that you talk of, Molly—it may be that he fell from it by accident into the sea."

"Couldn't," shortly corrected Molly. "There ain't no way to fall; no opening. They be biling up beautiful, mum."

"And—was he never—never seen again after that night?" pursued Madame Guise, casting a glance on the steaming saucepan.

"Never seen nor heard on," protested Molly, emphatically. "His clothes and his portmantel and all his other things have stayed on here; but he has never come back to claim 'em."

Madame Guise put her hands up to her pallid face, as if to hide its terror. Molly, her work done, and about to depart, was sweeping the stalks and herbs from the table into her clean check apron.

"Does the neighbourhood know all this?" asked Madame Guise, looking up. "Is it talked of openly? May I speak of it to the host and hostess downstairs?"

"Why, bless you, mum, yes! There have been nothing else talked of in the place since. Nobody hardly comes in here but what begins upon it."

Molly left with the last words. Madame Guise sat on, she knew not how long, her face buried in her hands, and the tisane was boiled too much. The little girl, soothed perhaps by the murmur of voices, had fallen asleep. By-and-by Mrs. Bent came up, to know when her guest would be ready for tea.

"I am ready now," was the lady's answer, after attending to the tisane. "And I wish that you and your husband, madame, would allow me to take the meal with you this one evening," added Madame Guise, with a slight shiver, as they descended the dark staircase. "I feel lonely and fatigued, and in want of companionship."

Mrs. Bent was gratified, rather than otherwise at the request. They descended; and she caused the tea-tray, already laid in their room, to be carried into the parlour. The same parlour, as the room above was the same bedroom, that had been occupied by the ill-fated Anthony Castlemaine.

"I hope you are a little less tired that you were when you arrived, madam," said John Bent, bowing, as he deprecatingly took his seat at last, and stirred his tea.

"Thank you, I have been forgetting my fatigue in listening to the story of one Mr. Anthony Castlemaine's disappearance," replied Madame Guise, striving to speak indifferently. "The account is curious, and has interested me. Molly thought you would give me the particulars."

"Oh, he'll do that, madam," put in Mrs. Bent, sharply. "There's nothing he likes better than talking of *that*. Tell the lady all about it, John."

John did as he was bid. But his account was in substance the same as Molly's. He could tell neither more nor less: of real information he could give none. The poor lady, hungering for a word of enlightenment that might tend to lessen her dread and horror, listened for it in vain.

"But what explanation can be given of it?" she urged, biting her dry lips to hide their trembling. "People cannot disappear without cause. Are you sure it was Mr. Castlemaine you saw go through the gate, and into the Friar's Keep?"

"I am as sure of it, ma'am, as I am that this is a tea-cup before me. Mr. Castlemaine denies it, though."

"And you suspect—you suspect that he murdered him! That is a frightful word; I cannot bear to say it. Murder!" she repeated, with a passing shiver. "It is frightful! You suspect Mr. Castlemaine, sir, I say?"

John Bent shook his head. The encounter with Ethel had taught him caution. "I don't know, ma'am," he answered; "I can't tell. That the young man was killed in some way, I have

no doubt of—and I think Mr. Castlemaine must know something about it."

"Are there any places in this—what you call it?—Friar's Keep?—that he could be concealed in? Any dungeons?"

"He's not there, ma'am. The place is open to anybody who likes to go in. Mr. Castlemaine had a man over from Stilborough to help him search, and they went all about it together. I and Superintendent Nettleby also went over it one day, and others with us. There wasn't a trace to be seen of young Mr. Anthony; nothing to show that he had been there."

"So it resolves itself into this," said Madame Guise—"that you saw this Mr. Anthony Castlemaine go into this dark place, on that February night; and, as far as can be ascertained, he never came out again."

"Just that," said John Bent. "I'd give this right hand of mine"—lifting it—"to know what his fate has been. Something tells me that it will yet be brought to light."

Madame Guise went up to her room, and sat there with her burthen of terror and sorrow, wondering what would be the next scene in this strange mystery, and what she herself could best do towards unravelling it. Mrs. Bent, coming in by-and-by, found her weeping hysterically. Marie woke up at the moment, and they gave her some of the tisane.

"It is the reaction of the cold and long journey, ma'am," pronounced Mrs. Bent, in regard to the tears she had seen. "And perhaps the talking about this unaccountable business has startled you. You will be better after a night's rest."

"Yes, the coach was very cold. I will say good-night to you and go to bed."

As Mrs. Bent retired, the lady sank on her knees by the side of her child, and buried her face in the white counterpane. There she prayed; prayed earnestly; for help from above; for strength to bear.

"The good God grant that the enlightenment may be less terrible than my fears," she implored, with uplifted hands and streaming eyes.

Back came Mrs. Bent, a wine-glass in one hand, a hot-water bottle for the bed in the other. The glass contained some of her famous cordial—in her opinion a remedy for half the ills under the sun. Madame Guise was then quietly seated by the

fire, gazing into it with a far-away look, her hands folded on her lap. She drank the cordial with thanks: though it seemed of no moment what she drank or what she did not drink just then. And little Marie, her cheeks flushed, her rosy lips open sufficiently to show her pretty white teeth, had dropped off to sleep again.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STORM.

The wind was rising. Coming in blasts from across the sea, it swept round the Dolphin Inn with a force that seemed to shake the old walls and rattle the window-panes. Madame Guise, slowly undressing by the expiring fire in her chamber, shivered as she listened to it.

The wind did not howl in this fashion around her own sheltered home in the sunny Dauphiné. There was no grand sea there for it to whirl and play over, and come off with a shriek and a wail. Not often there did they have cold weather such as this; or white snow covering the plains; or ice in the water-jugs. And never before in her uneventful life had it fallen to her lot to travel across France with a little child to take care of, and encounter the many hours' passage in a raging sea: and then after a night's rest in London to come off again in the cold English stage-coach for how many miles she knew not. All this might well have taken the colour from her face and given the shiverings to her frame—for land travelling in those days was not the easy matter that it is now.

But there was worse behind it. Not the cold, not the want of rest, were so trying to her as the frightful whispers of a supposed tragedy that had greeted her arrival at the Dolphin. Only a few hours within its walls, and she had been told that the husband of whom she had come in secret search had disappeared out of life.

For this poor young lady, Charlotte Guise, was in truth the wife of Anthony Castlemaine. His wife, if he were still living; his widow, if he were dead. That he was dead, hearing all she had heard, no doubt existed in her mind; not the faintest

shadow of hope could enter her heart. She had come this journey in search of her husband, fearing some vague, uncertain treachery; she had arrived to find that treachery of the deepest dye had only too probably put him out of sight for ever.

When the father, Basil Castlemaine, was on his death-bed, she had heard his charge to Anthony, to come to England and put in a claim to his inheritance; she had heard the warning of possible treachery that had accompanied it.

Basil died. And when Anthony, in obedience to his father's last injunctions, was making ready for the journey to England, his wife alluded to the warning. He laughed and answered jokingly: saying that if he never returned to Gap, she might come off to seek the reason, and to discover if he were still in the land of the living. Ah, how many a word spoken in jest would, if we might read the future, bear solemn meaning! That was a case in point.

Anthony Castlemaine departed on his mission, leaving his wife and child in their home at Gap. The first letter Charlotte received from her husband told her of his arrival at Greylands, and that he had put up at the Dolphin Inn. It intimated that he might not find his course a smooth one, and that his uncle James was in possession of Greylands' Rest. A few days later on she received a second letter from him; and following closely upon it; by the next post in fact; a third. Both these letters bore the same date. The first stated that he was not advancing at all; that every impediment was being placed in his way by his uncles; they appeared resolved to keep him out of the estate, refusing even to show him how it was left; and it ended with an expressed conviction that his uncle James was usurping it. The last letter told her that since posting the other letter earlier in the day, he had seen his uncle James; that the interview, which had taken place in a meadow, was an unpleasant one; his uncle had even tried to strike him: that he (Anthony) really did not know what to do, but had resolved to seek one more conference with his uncle before proceeding to legal measures; and that he should certainly write to her again in the course of a day or two to tell her whether matters had made any progress. In this last letter ran a vein of sadness, very perceptible to the wife. She thought her husband must have

been very depressed when he wrote it: and she anxiously looked for the promised news.

It never came. No subsequent letter ever reached her. After waiting some days, she wrote to her husband at the Dolphin Inn, but received no answer. She wrote again, with the same result. Then, strangely uneasy, not knowing how to obtain tidings of him, or to whom to apply, she began to think that she would have to carry out the suggestion he had spoken in jest, and go over to England in search of him. A short period of vacillation—for it seemed a frightfully formidable step to the inexperienced young lady—and her resolve was taken. Arranging the affairs of her petit ménage, as she expressed it, she started with her child; and in due time reached London. There she remained one night, after sending off a note to Greylands, directed to her husband at the Dolphin Inn, to announce her intended arrival on the following day; and in the morning took her seat in the Stilborough coach. These three letters, the two from Gap and the one from London, were those that led to the dispute between Mr. and Mrs. Bent, which Ethel Reene had disturbed. The landlord had them safely locked up in his private archives.

Forewarned, forearmed, is an old saying. Anthony Castlemaine's wife had been warned, and she strove to be armed. She would not present herself openly and in her own name at Greylands. If the Castlemaines were dealing hardly with her husband, it would be more prudent to go to work warily and appear as a stranger. The worst she had feared was, that Mr. James Castlemaine might be keeping her husband at bay; perhaps had even imprisoned him—she did not understand English laws—and she must discover and release him. So she called herself Guise as soon as she landed in England. Her name had been Guise before her marriage, and she assumed it now. No great assumption: for, according to the French customs of her native place, she added her maiden name to her husband's, and her cards were printed Madame Castlemaine-Guise. Her intention had been to proceed to Stilborough, put up there, and come over to Greylands the following day. But when she found that the coach passed through Greylands—and she first recognized the place by the sign of the famous dolphin, which Anthony had described to her in his first letter—she resolved to alight

there, the little girl's feverish symptoms affording an excuse for doing so. And so, here she was, at the Dolphin, in the very chamber that her ill-fated husband had occupied, and with the dread story she had listened to beating its terrors in her brain.

A blast of wind shook the white dimity curtain, drawn before the casement, and she turned to it with a shiver. What did this angry storm mean? Why should it have arisen without apparent warning? Charlotte Guise was rather superstitious, and asked herself the question. When she alighted from the coach at the inn door, the air and sea were calm. Could the disturbance have come to show her that the very elements were rising in anger at the wrong dealt out to her husband? Some such an idea took possession of her.

The wind shrieked as if it were chanting a requiem; the small panes of the casement rattled and shook, and the white curtain fluttered. Charlotte Guise hid her shrinking face for a moment, and then turned it towards the window, her white lips parting with scarcely breathed words.

"If the spirits of the dead are permitted to haunt the air, as some believe, it may be that *his* spirit is here now, seeking to hold commune with mine; calling upon me to avenge him. Oh, Anthony! I will never rest until I have found out the mystery of your fate. I will devote my life to it if it be necessary!"

As if to encourage the singular fancy, that the weird surroundings of the hour had called up to her overstrung nerves and brain, a rushing blast wilder than any that had gone before swept past the house at the moment and died away in a wild and melancholy moan. The casement shook as though some unhappy spirit were indeed craving admission: and the poor young lady, in some irrepressible access of courage, born of desperation, drew aside the curtain and looked forth.

No, no; nothing there but the wind. The snow lay white on the ground, and the cliff that skirted the beach to the right. The night was light, disclosing the foam of the waves as they rose and fell; clouds swept hurriedly across the face of the sky.

The little girl stirred in bed and threw out her arms. Her mother let fall the window curtain and softly approached her.

The hot face wore its fever-flush; the large brown eyes, so like her father's, opened; the red lips parted with a cry.

"Maman! Marie soif; Marie veut boire."

"Oh, is she indeed fatherless?" mentally cried the poor mother, as she took up the glass of tisane. The child took it with her hot and trembling little hands, and drank from it. Before her mother had replaced it within the fender and returned to her, her pretty face was on the pillow again, her eyes were closing.

Madame Guise—as we must continue to call her—went to bed: but not to sleep. The wind raged, her child was restless, her own mind was a chaos of horror and trouble. The words of the prophet in Holy Writ might indeed have been applied to her: The whole head was sick and the whole heart faint.

Towards morning she fell into a disturbed sleep, during which a dream visited her. It was a singular dream. She thought herself alone in a strange, darkened garden: gloomy trees clustered about her, threatening mountains rose above. She seemed searching for something; to be obliged to search, but she knew not for what; a great dread lay upon her, and but for some unseen power she would not have dared to put one foot before the other in the dark pathway. Suddenly, as she was pushing her way through impeding trees, her husband stood before her. She put out her hand to greet him. He did not respond to it, but remained where he had halted, gazing fixedly at her. It was not the husband who had parted from her in the sunny south; a man full of glad anticipations, with a bright fresh face, and joyous words on his lips: but her husband with a sad, stern countenance, pale and cold. Her heart seemed to sink within her, and before she could ask him what was wrong, she saw that he was touching his waistcoat with his left hand, and pointing to a shot in the region of the heart. A sensation of terror, far more dreadful than any she could ever know in life, seized her at the sight; she cried aloud and awoke. Awoke with the moisture of agony on her face, and trembling in every limb.

It will at once suggest itself to every practical mind that this dream, remarkable though it was, could only have been the result of her own imaginative thoughts, of the tale she had heard, of the fears and doubts she had dwelt upon before falling

asleep. But she, poor, distressed, lonely lady, looked upon it as a revelation. From that moment she never doubted that her husband had been shot as described; shot and killed: and that the hand that did it was Mr. Castlemaine's.

Her child was awaking with a moan. She had been baptized Mary Ursula. Her grandfather, Basil, never called her anything else; her father would sometimes shorten it to "Marie Ursule:" but her mother, less accustomed to English, generally used the one name only, Marie. She looked up and put out her little hands to her mother: her eyes were heavy, her cheeks still flushed and feverish.

That the child was worse than she had been the previous night seemed certain, and Madame Guise felt some alarm. When breakfast was over—of which meal the child refused to partake, but still complained of thirst—she inquired whether there was a doctor in the place. Mrs. Bent privately put down the want of improvement to the rubbishing tisane. Had a good wholesome powder been administered overnight, she was of opinion that the child would have been all right this morning.

The doctor, Mr. Parker, came in answer to the summons: a pleasant, grey-haired man. He had formerly been in practice at Stilborough; but after a dangerous illness which had lasted more than a year, he took the advice of his friends and retired from the fatigues of his profession. His means were sufficient for a competency. Removing to Greylands, for the benefit of the sea-breezes, he grew to like the quietude of the place, and determined to make it his home. A small, pretty villa happened to be for sale, and he purchased it. It lay back from the coach-road beyond the Dolphin, almost opposite the avenue leading to Greylands' Rest. The house belonged to Mr. Blackett of the Grange—the chief residence at a small hamlet about two miles away; and Mr. Castlemaine had always intended to purchase it if it came into the market, but Mr. Blackett had hitherto refused all offers. His deciding to do so at length was a sudden whim; Mr. Parker heard of it, and secured the little property—which at the time was anything but agreeable to the Master of Greylands.

There Mr. Parker had since resided, becoming strong and healthy again. He had so far resumed his calling as to attend

when a doctor was wanted in Greylands, for there was none nearer than Stilborough. At first Mr. Parker took to responding for humanity's sake when appealed to, and he continued it from love of his profession. Not for one visit in ten was he paid, nor did he want payment: the fishermen were poor, and he was large-hearted.

After examining the little traveller, he pronounced her suffering from a slight attack of inflammation of the chest, induced, no doubt, by the cold to which she had been exposed. Madame Guise informed him that they had journeyed from Paris (it was no untruth, for they had passed through the French capital and stayed there a night), and the weather had become very sharp as they neared the coast—which coast it had taken them two days and a night in the diligence to reach; and the sea-voyage had been fearfully hard, and had tried the child. Yes, the doctor answered, the cold had attacked the little girl, and she must remain in bed and be carefully nursed. Madame Guise took occasion to observe that she had been going farther, but, on perceiving her child's symptoms, had halted at this small village of Greylands, which looked open and healthy—but the wind had risen at night. Risen very much and very suddenly, assented the doctor; risen to a gale; and it was all the better for the little one that she had not gone on. He thought he might have to put a small blister on in the afternoon, but he should see.

"Oh, I see it all: Heaven is helping me," mentally spoke poor Charlotte Guise, as she took up her post by Marie after the doctor's departure, and revolved matters in her mind. "This illness has been purposely sent: a token that I have done right in coming to Greylands, and that I am to remain here. And, by the good help of Heaven, I will remain until I have tracked the fate of my husband to Mr. Castlemaine."

CHAPTER XIV.

PLOTTING.

The illness of little Marie Guise lasted several days. Sitting by her bedside—as she did for hours together—Madame Guise had time to lay out her plans. That is, as far as it was possible to do so. Her sole object in life now—save and except the child—was to solve the mystery of her husband's fate; her one hope to bring home the crime to Mr. Castlemaine. How to set about it she knew not. She would have to account in some plausible manner for her prolonged stay at Greylands, and to conceal her identity. Above all, she must take care never to betray any interest in the fate of Anthony Castlemaine.

To remain in Greylands, or in England at all, might be rather difficult, unless she could get some employment to add to her slender means. She knew perfectly well that without her husband's signature, the cautious French bankers and men of business who held his property in their hands, would not advance much, if any of it, to her, unless proofs of his death were forthcoming. She possessed a little income of her own: and she must think out ways and means of its being transmitted to her in secret, without betraying at Greylands who she was, and what she was. This might be done: but the money would be insufficient to support her and her child as gentlewomen.

"I think I should like to make a sojourn in Greylands," she observed to Mrs. Bent, cautiously opening the subject, on the first day that Marie could be pronounced convalescent, and was taken down to the parlour for a change.

"Why, should you, ma'am?" returned the landlady briskly. "Well, it's a nice place, and very healthy."

"I like the sea—and I should wish my little one to remain quiet now for a time. I have suffered too much anxiety on her account to take her travelling again just yet."

"Sweet little thing!" aspirated Mrs. Bent. "Her pretty rosy colour is beginning to come back to her again. I've never seen a child with a brighter face."

"It is like her—like that of some of our relatives: they have bright complexions," said Madame Guise, who only just saved herself from saying—like her father's. "For her sake I will remain here some two or three months. Do you think I could find an apartment?"

"An apartment!" repeated Mrs. Bent, who took the word literally, and was somewhat puzzled. "Did you mean a single room, ma'am?"

"I mean two or three rooms. Or a small house—what you call a cottage."

"Oh, I see, ma'am," said the landlady. "I think you might do that. Some of the larger cottages let rooms in the summer to people coming over from Stilborough for the sea-air. And there's one pretty furnished cottage empty on the cliff."

"Would the rent be much?" asked Madame Guise, timidly, for a whole furnished cottage seemed a formidable enterprise.

"Next to nothing at this season," spoke Mrs. Bent, confidentially. "Here, John Bent—where are you?" she cried, throwing open the door. "What's the rent of—— "

"Master's out," interrupted Molly, appearing for a moment from the back-kitchen.

"Just like him!" retorted Mrs. Bent. "He is out when he's wanted, and at home when he's not. It's always the way with the men. Anyway, it's a nice little place, ma'am, and I know it would be reasonable."

The cottage she alluded to was situated in the most picturesque part of the cliff, close to the neatly kept cottage that had so long been inhabited by Miss Hallet and her very pretty niece. It was plainly furnished, and might be let at this season, including steel knives and forks, for fifteen shillings a-week, Mrs. Bent thought. In summer the rent would be twenty-five: and the tenant had to find linen.

Madame Guise went into mental arithmetic. Fifteen shillings a-week! With the rent, the cost of a servant, and housekeeping, and various little extras that are somehow never thought of beforehand, but that inevitably arise afterwards, she saw that the sum total would be more than she could command. And she hesitated to take the cottage.

Nevertheless, she went with Mrs. Bent to see it, and found it just what she should have liked. It was not quite so nice as

Miss Hallet's, only a few yards off: but then Miss Hallet took so much care that hers should be perfection.

"If I could only earn a little money!" repeated Charlotte to herself. "I wonder whether those good ladies at the Grey Nunnery could help me! I have a great mind to ask them."

After some deliberation, she went over to do so. It was a warm, pleasant day; for the capricious weather had once more changed; snow and frost had given place to a soft west wind and genial sunshine—and Madame Guise was shown into the reception-parlour. Sisters Margaret and Grizzel sat there, and rose at her entrance. They had heard of this lady traveller, who had been detained on her journey by the illness of her little girl, and was staying at the Dolphin; but they had not seen her. It was with some curiosity, therefore, that the ladies gazed at her to learn what she was like. A slender, nice-looking young lady, with blue eyes and fair hair, and who seemed to carry some care in her countenance.

Madame Guise introduced herself; apologizing for her intrusion, and telling them at once its object. She wished to make some stay at Greylands, for she thought the pure air and sea-breezes would strengthen her child—could the ladies help her to some employment by which she might earn a trifle. She had a little income, but not quite sufficient. She could teach music and French, or do fine needlework and embroidery.

The ladies answered her very kindly—they were both taken with the gentle stranger—but shook their heads to her petition: they could give no help.

"The children we bring up here are poor and do not need accomplishments," said Sister Margaret. "If they did, we should teach them in the Nunnery: indeed, we should be ourselves thankful for pupils of a better class, for we also are poor. Sister Mona is a good French scholar; and Sister Charlotte's music is perfect. As to fine work, we do not know any one who ever requires it."

"But we should have been very glad to help you, if we had had it in our power," put in Sister Grizzel, with a pleasant smile.

Madame Guise rose, with a sigh. She saw exactly how it was—the Grey Nunnery was about the last place able to assist her. In leaving the parlour, she met a lady, young and stately,

who was entering it; one of singular beauty, gracious in manner and presence.

"Our Superior, Sister Mary Ursula," said Sister Grizzel.

And Madame Guise knew that it was her husband's cousin—for Miss Castlemaine had joined the Sisterhood some days ago. She wore the clear muslin cap over her luxuriant hair, but not the Grey habit, for she had not put aside the mourning for her father. In the magnificent dark eyes, the bright complexion and the beautiful features, Madame Guise saw the likeness to her husband and to the rest of the Castlemaines. Sister Mary Ursula bowed and said a few gracious words: Madame Guise responded with one of her elaborate French curtsies, and passed onwards through the gate.

"So that hope has failed!" she thought, as she crossed over to the inn. "I might have known it would: with so many accomplished ladies amongst their own order, the Sisters cannot want other aid."

Lost in thought, perplexed as to her future course, Madame Guise did not at once go indoors, but sat down on the bench outside. The window of the sitting-room occupied by John Bent and his wife stood open—for Mrs. Bent liked plenty of fresh air—and people were talking inside. On that same bench had more than once sat her unfortunate husband, looking at the water as she was now looking, at the fishermen on the beach, the boats out at sea, their white sails furled to the sunny calm. She was mentally wondering what else she could try, now that her mission to the Grey Sisters had failed; asking herself how little she and Marie could live upon, if she found nothing to do. Gradually the voices within grew louder, and words shaped themselves to her ear. She heard the landlady's voice and another voice: not John Bent's, but the ready voice of a gentleman. It was in truth Harry Castlemaine's; who, passing the inn, had turned in for a gossip.

"It seems to me like a great sacrifice, Mr. Harry," were the first distinct words that fell on Madame Guise's ear. "The Grey Ladies are very good and noble; next door to angels, I'm sure, when folk are sick; but it is not the right life for Miss Castlemaine."

"We told her so until we were tired," returned Harry Castlemaine. "It has grievously cut up my father. We will

drop the subject, Mrs. Bent: I cannot speak of it with patience. How is the little invalid getting on?"

"As well as can be, sir. She is just now upstairs in her afternoon sleep. But talking of children," broke off Mrs. Bent, "what is this mishap that has happened to Miss Flora? We hear she met with some accident yesterday."

"Mounted to the top of the gardener's ladder and fell off it," said Harry, with equanimity. "She is always in mischief."

"And was she hurt, sir?"

"Not much. Grazed her face in a few places and put her wrist out. She will soon come to greater grief unless they get some one to take care of her. Having been so long without a governess, the young damsel is as wild as a colt."

"The last time Mrs. Castlemaine passed here on foot, Mr. Harry, she told me she had just engaged a governess. It must be a fortnight ago."

"And she had done so; but the lady was taken ill and threw up the situation. Mrs. Castlemaine is hard to please in the matter of governesses. She must have perfect French and perfect music: and the two, united with other qualifications, seem difficult to find. Mrs. Castlemaine was talking this morning of advertising."

"Dear me! to think that such a fine post as that should be going a-begging!" cried the landlady. "A gentleman's home and a plenty of comfort, and—and how much pay is it a-year, Mr. Harry?"

"Fifty guineas, I think," said the young man, carelessly, as though fifty-guinea salaries were an everyday trifle. Mrs. Bent lifted her hands.

"Fifty guineas!—and her bed and board. And only one little lady to teach; and gentlefolk to live with! My goodness! Mr. Harry, one would think half the ladies in England would jump at it."

One lady at least was ready to do so: she who sat outside, overhearing the tale. The lips of Charlotte Guise parted as she listened; her cheeks flushed with excitement. If she could herself obtain this situation!—become an inmate of the house where dwelt her husband's destroyer, James Castlemaine! How clear and straightforward would be her path of discovery then, compared with what it would be in that cottage on the cliff, or

in any other position she could hope to find! She could daily, hourly watch Mr. Castlemaine; and it must surely be her fault if she did not track the deed home to him! As to her fitness for the post, why, French was her native language, and in music she was a finished performer: and she could certainly undertake general instruction!

While the flush was yet on her face, the light of excitement in her eyes, Harry Castlemaine came out. Seeing her, he guessed who she was, took off his hat and politely accosted her, saying he was glad to hear the little girl was improving. Madame Guise rose. It was the first time she had spoken to him.

"I thank you, sir, for your good wishes: yes, she is getting well now. And I—I beg your pardon—I think I heard you just now say to Madame Bent—the window is open—that you found it difficult to meet with a governess for your house."

"My people find it so. Why?—do you know of one?" he added, smiling.

"I think I do, sir."

"Mrs. Castlemaine is very difficult to please, especially as regards French," he said, still smiling; "and the French of some of the ladies who have applied has turned out to be of a very English description, so they would not suit her. If you chanced to know of any one, who was really eligible, madam, you would confer a favour by introducing the lady to the notice of Mrs. Castlemaine."

"Sir, I will think of it."

He bowed again as he wished her good-day. And Madame Guise, gazing after him, thought again that Heaven was surely working for her, in thus opening a prospect of entrance to the house of Mr. Castlemaine.

CHAPTER XV.

MADAME GUISE.

Turning out of the Dolphin, by its front-entrance, went Charlotte Guise, in morning attire. It was a bright afternoon, and the fields were green again. Leaving Mr. Parker's house on her left, she presently came to the turning to Greylands'

Rest, and passed on up the avenue. It was a wide avenue, and very nearly half-a-mile in length, with noble oaks and elms on either side. At the end was the gate admitting to the domain.

The house lay still and quiet in the sunshine. Madame Guise looked at it with yearning eyes, for it was the place that had probably cost her poor husband his life. But for asserting his claim to it, he might yet be living: and whether that claim was right or wrong, she hoped with her whole heart would be proved before she herself should die. Miles answered her ring at the bell.

"Can I see Mrs. Castlemaine?"

"Mrs. Castlemaine is out in the carriage, ma'am. Mr. Castlemaine is at home."

Hesitating a moment, for the very name of the Master of Greylands carried dread to the heart of Charlotte Guise, yet fearful lest delay might cause her application to be too late, she said she would be glad to speak with Mr. Castlemaine. Miles admitted her into the hall—a large, old-fashioned room, with a wood fire blazing in it. Along a passage to the right lay the warding-room, and into this room Miles ushered the lady.

Mrs. Castlemaine generally went out for a drive once a-day. This afternoon she had taken Flora; whose face was adorned with sundry patches of sticking-plaster, the result of the fall from the ladder. In the red room sat Ethel Reene, painting flowers on cardboard for a hand-screen: and the Master of Greylands stood with his back to the fire, talking to her. They were speaking of Miss Castlemaine.

"Papa, I think we must give up all hope," Ethel was saying. "Rely upon it, Mary will not leave the Nunnery again."

Mr. Castlemaine's face darkened. Though holding the same conviction himself, the step his niece had taken in entering the Nunnery was so unpalatable to him that he could not bear to hear the opinion confirmed. He hated the Grey Sisters. He would have rid Greylands of their presence, had it been in his power.

"It is a sin, to waste her life in this manner!" he said, his tones betraying his mortification. "Ethel, I think we cannot have made her happy here."

"It was not that, papa. She told me she had been cherishing the idea before she came to Greylands."

"A meddling, tattling set of tabby cats! Mary Ursula ought—— Well, Miles?" For the man had entered the room and was waiting to speak.

"A lady has come here, sir, asking to see Mrs. Castlemaine. When I said my mistress was out, she said she would be glad to speak a few words to you. She is in the drawing-room, sir."

"What lady is it?" returned the Master of Greylands.

"Well, sir, I'm not sure, but I fancy it is the one staying at the Dolphin, with the sick child. Any way, she's a very nice, pleasant-looking young lady, sir, whoever she is."

"I'm sure I don't know what she can want with me," remarked Mr. Castlemaine, as he walked off to the drawing-room. But thought is quick: and a fancy of what might have brought her here crossed his mind ere he turned the handle of the door.

She was seated near the fire in the low but handsome room; her face studiously turned from the one conspicuous portrait that hung opposite the fireplace, for its likeness to her husband had struck her with a chill. She rose at Mr. Castlemaine's entrance and curtsied as only a Frenchwoman can curtsy. He saw an elegant-looking young woman with a pleasing countenance and somewhat timid manner. Mr. Castlemaine supposed her to be nervous; probably unused to society: for in these first minutes of the interview she trembled visibly. He, of course, had heard with the rest of Greylands, of the lady traveller who had shortened her journey at the Dolphin in consequence of the illness of her child, and who was supposed to be going on again as soon as she could safely do so. Mr. Castlemaine had thought no more about it than that. But the idea that crossed him now was, that this lady, having been detained at the inn, might be short of funds to pursue her journey, and had come to apply to him in the difficulty. Readily would he have responded; for he had a generous hand and heart. To hear, therefore, that the real object of her visit was to solicit the vacant situation of governess in his household, surprised him not a little.

Her tale was plausible. Mr. Castlemaine, utterly unsuspicious in regard to her, never doubted its truth. The lady

made a favourable impression on him, and he was very courteous to her.

She was a widow, she said: and she had come over from Paris with two objects in view. One was to seek out a relative that she believed was somewhere in England, though she did not positively know whether he was still living; the other was to obtain employment as a governess—for she had been given to understand that French governesses were at a premium in the English country, and her own slender means were insufficient to support herself and her little girl. Journeying by coach, she had found her child attacked with fever, which compelled a halt at Greylands. Liking the place, she had thought that she should do well to keep her child there for a time, and was hoping to make arrangements to do so. Should she be so fortunate as to obtain the post in Mr. Castlemaine's household, the thing would be easily accomplished. Very plausibly she told the tale; turning, however, hot and cold alternately, and detesting herself for the abhorred deceit.

"But—pardon me, madam—what, in that case, would you do with the child?" asked Mr. Castlemaine.

"I would place her with some good and careful woman, sir. That would not be difficult. And the child would enjoy all the benefit of sea-air. In my country, children are more frequently brought up at nurse than at home."

"I have heard so," observed Mr. Castlemaine. "You speak English remarkably well, madam, for a Frenchwoman. Have you been much in this country?"

"Never before, sir. My mother was English, and she always talked to me in her own tongue. I was reared in her faith—a Protestant. My father was French, and a Catholic. Upon their marriage, it was agreed that, of the children to be born, the boys should be brought up in his faith and the girls in hers. But I was the only child; I had neither brother nor sister.

All true. Madame Guise did not add, for it was unnecessary, that towards the close of her father's life he entered into large speculations, and ruined himself. He and her mother were both dead now. She said just what she was obliged to say, and no more.

"And it is, I presume, to see your mother's relatives that ou have come to England?" pursued Mr. Castlemaine.

"Yes, sir," she answered, after a moment's hesitation; for it came indeed hard to Charlotte Guise to tell a deliberate untruth, although necessity might almost justify it. "My mother used to talk much of one relative that she had here—a brother. He may not be living now: I do not know."

"In what part of England did he live?"

"I think he must have been a traveller, sir, for he seemed to move about. We would hear of him, now in the south of England, now in the north, and now in the west. He often seemed to be in what my mother called remote counties—Cumberland and Westmoreland."

"Cumberland and Westmoreland!" echoed Mr. Castlemaine. "Dear me! And have you no other clue than that?"

"None, sir. I do not, I say, know whether he is still alive."

"Well, it seems—pardon me—to be a somewhat wild-goose chase that you have entered on. What is his name?"

"My mother's maiden name was Williams. He was her brother."

Mr. Castlemaine shook his head. "Not at all an uncommon name," he said, "and I fear, madam, you might find some difficulty in tracing him out."

"Yes, I fear so. I find those places are very far off. At any rate, I will not think more of it for the present. My little child, I see it now, is too young to travel."

In all this, Madame Guise had spoken the simple truth. The facts were as she stated. The only falsehood was the representation that it was this relative, this unknown uncle, she had come over to discover. During her long journey, through France, she had said to herself that after she had found her husband, they might perhaps, together, endeavour to find her uncle: but that was all.

"Yes, the child is too young and delicate to travel," pursued Madame Guise, "and I dare not take her on. This illness of hers has frightened me, and I shall, if possible, remain here by the sea."

"I presume, madam—pardon me—that you were hoping to obtain help from this uncle."

"Yes," was the faltering answer. "Should you admit me into your house, sir, I will do my best to advance the studies of your daughter."

"But—will you reconcile yourself to a situation of this kind in a stranger's house, after having ruled in a home of your own?" questioned Mr. Castlemaine, considerately, as he remembered his wife's domineering and difficult temper.

"Ah, sir, the beggars, you know, must not be the choosers. I must do something to keep myself, and I would rather do this than anything else."

"The salary Mrs. Castlemaine offers is fifty guineas."

"It seems a large sum to me, sir," was the candid answer. "Appointments in France, a very few excepted, are not so highly paid as in England. I should of course be permitted to go out to see my child?"

"Dear me, yes: whenever you pleased, madam. You would be quite at liberty here—quite as one of ourselves. Mrs. Castlemaine—but here she is; returning home."

The Master of Greylands had heard the carriage drawing up. He quitted the room, and said a few hasty words to his wife of what had occurred. Mrs. Castlemaine, much taken with the project, came in, in her black satin pelisse, coated with crape. She sat down and put a few questions as to the applicant's acquirements.

"I am a brilliant pianist, madam, as I know you sometimes phrase it in your country," said Madame Guise. "My French is of course pure; and I could teach dancing. Not drawing; I do not understand it."

"Drawing is quite a minor consideration," replied Mrs. Castlemaine. "Could you undertake the English?"

"Why not, madam? I am almost as well read in English as in French. And I am clever at embroidery, and other fine and fancy needlework."

"Do you understand that you would have to undertake Miss Reene's music also? She is my step-daughter."

"It would be a pleasure to me, madam. I am fond of music."

Mr. Castlemaine came into the room again at this juncture. "What part of France have you lived in?" he asked. "Did I understand you to say in Paris?"

Another necessary untruth, or next door to one, for Charlotte Guise! Were she to say, "My native province is that of the Dauphiné, and I have lived near Gap," it might create suspicion at once. She swallowed down a cough that rose to her throat.

"Not quite in Paris, sir. A little beyond it."

"And—pardon me—could you give references?"

Madame Guise looked up helplessly. The colour flushed into her face; for the fear of losing the appointment became very present to her.

"I know not how. I never was a governess before; and in that respect no one could speak for me. I am of respectable family: my father was a rentier, and much considered. For myself, I am of discreet conduct and manners—surely you cannot doubt it," she added, the tears of emotion in her eyes, as she looked at them.

They looked back in return: Mr. Castlemaine thinking what a nice, ladylike, earnest woman she was, one he could take on trust; Mrs. Castlemaine, seduced by the prospect of pure French for Flora, eagerly wishing to ratify the bargain. Madame Guise mistook the silence, supposing they were hesitating.

"I could have a letter written to you from Paris," she said. "I possess a friend there, who will, I am sure, satisfy you that I am of good conduct and family. Would more than this be required?"

"Not any more; it would be quite sufficient," Mrs. Castlemaine hastened to say with emphasis. And, without waiting for the promised letter—which, as she observed, could come later—she engaged the governess on the spot. Mr. Castlemaine attended Madame Guise to the door: and never a suspicion crossed him that she was more than she had represented herself. How should it do so? How was he likely to connect this lady-traveller—detained at Greylands by accident, so timid in manner, so evidently distressed about her child—with the unfortunate Anthony, lost since that fatal February night?

Madame Guise went out from the interview. In some respects it had not been satisfactory. She had gone to it picturing Mr. Castlemaine as a monster of iniquity: a man crafty, cruel, sinister, from whom the world might shrink. She found him a good-looking, pleasing gentleman, with a high-bred air, a kind and apparently sincere manner, and with the wonderful resemblance to his brother Basil and to her own poor husband. How had it been possible, she asked herself, for such a man to commit that most dreadful crime, and still be what he was? How wickedly deceitful some great criminals were!

Mrs. Bent, when consulted, made strong objection to the nursing scheme, expressing a most decided opinion.

"Put the sweet child to any one of those old women! Why, the next news would be that she had rolled down the cliff, or had tumbled into the sea! I should not like to risk it for a child of mine, ma'am."

"I must do something with her," said Madame Guise, setting her lips tightly. Give up her plan, she would not; she believed Heaven itself had aided her; but no one knew how much it cost her to part with this great treasure, her child. From the hour of its birth, it had never left her. The devotion of some French women to their children seems as remarkable as the neglect of others.

"There's one thing you might do with her, ma'am, if you chose—and far better too than consigning her to any old nurse-woman."

"What is that?"

"Well, I'll take the liberty of suggesting it," cried Mrs. Bent. "Put her to the Grey Sisters."

"The Grey Sisters!" echoed Madame Guise, struck with the suggestion. "But would they take one so young, think you? A little child who can scarcely speak!"

"I think they'd take her and be glad of it. Why, ma'am, children are like playthings to them. They have the fishermen's children by day to teach and train; and they keep them at night too when the little ones are sick."

No suggestion could have been more welcome to Madame Guise. The wonder was, that she had not herself thought of it: and no doubt would have done so had Marie been older. To put the matter at rest, she went over at once to the Nunnery. Sister Charlotte received her, and heard her proposal joyfully.

Admit a little child amongst them! Yes; and take the greatest care of her; and train her, they hoped, on the road to heaven. They would be glad to have two or three children of the better class, no matter what the age; the money paid for them would be an assistance, for the Sisterhood was poor. Though, indeed, now that Sister Mary Ursula—Miss Castlemaine—had joined them, they were better off.

"I am so glad to hear you say she may come," said Madame Guise. "I had feared my little one was too young. She must

have everything done for her, and she cannot speak plainly. English she does not speak at all, though she understands it."

"She will soon learn it with us: and we will try and make her happy. But I must summon our Superior," added Sister Charlotte, "for I may not take upon myself to decide this, though I know how welcome it will be."

The Superior came in, in the person of Miss Castlemaine. Alas, no longer to be called so—but Sister Mary Ursula. She swept in in her silk mourning dress, the muslin cap shading her beautiful hair, and greeted Madame Guise with all her winning manner, holding out her hand in welcome. In some turn of the face, or some glance of the eye—it was hard to define what—so strong a likeness to the lost and ill-fated Anthony momentarily shone out from Miss Castlemaine's countenance, that poor Madame Guise turned faint. But she had to control all feeling now; she had passed into another character and left her own identity behind.

Seated opposite to her, giving her her best attention, Sister Mary Ursula listened to the story Madame Guise told. She had engaged herself as governess at Greylands' Rest, and wished to be allowed to place her child with the Grey Ladies.

"Is the situation at Greylands' Rest one that you think will suit you?—do you feel that it is what you will like to undertake?" Miss Castlemaine inquired when the speaker paused: for at the first moment she had thought that it was only her opinion that was being asked.

"Yes, I do think so. I am glad to have obtained it."

"Then I can only say that I hope you will be happy in it, and find it all you can wish. I am sure you will like my uncle. Your pupil is self-willed, and has been much indulged by her mother. You will be able, I trust, to bring her into better ways."

"And you will take my little girl, madam?"

"Certainly. It is very good of you to confide her to us."

"It is very good of you to agree to take her, madam. I am very glad! And how much shall I pay you for her?"

Miss Castlemaine shook her head with a smile. "I have not been here long enough to act on my own judgment," she said: "upon all knotty points I consult Sister Mildred. We will let you know in the course of the day."

Madame Guise rose. But for the dreadful suspicion that lay upon her, the crime she was going out of her way to track, she would have liked to throw herself into the arms of this gracious lady, and exclaim with tears, "You are my husband's cousin. Oh, pity me, for I was Anthony's wife!" But it might not be. She had entered on her task, and must go through with it.

And when a dainty little note in Sister Margaret's writing was brought over to the Dolphin in the evening by Sister Ann, Madame Guise found that the ladies had fixed a very small sum as payment for her child—at the rate of four pounds a-quarter: or, sixteen pounds a-year.

The child went over on the following day. She was entered as Mademoiselle Marie Guise. Very much astonished would those good ladies have been had they known that her true name was the same as that of their Superior—Mary Ursula Castlemaine! There was no fear of the child betraying secrets. She was very *backward:* seemed to have forgotten all about her father, and could not have told the name of her native place, where it was, or anything about it, if closely questioned. Trouble was expected with her at the parting. Her mother was advised not to attempt to see her for some three or four days after she went over to the Nunnery: but rather to give her time to become reconciled to the change, and to this new abode.

It was cruel penance to the mother, this parting; worse than it could have been to the child. Those who understand the affection of some French mothers for their children, and who remember that the little ones never leave their side, will know what this must have been for Charlotte Guise. She saw Marie at a distance on the following day, Sunday—for it happened to be Saturday that the child went in. The little church was filled at the three-o'clock afternoon service, when Parson Marston gabbled through the prayers and the sermon to the edification of his flock. Little Marie sat in the large pew with the Grey Ladies, between Sister Mary Ursula in her black attire, and Sister Betsy in her grey. The latter, who had a special love for children, had taken the little one under her particular charge. Marie was in black also: and a keen observer might have fancied there was some sort of likeness

between her and the stately Head Sister beside her. The child looked happy and contented.

Very dull was poor Charlotte Guise all that Sunday evening. She would not meet little Marie on coming out of church, though her heart yearned to give a fond word and kiss; but so anxiously bent was she upon entering Greylands' Rest, that she shrank from anything that might imperil the child's stay at the Nunnery. After taking tea in her parlour, she sat awhile in her own room above-stairs; indulging her sadness. It was sometimes greater than she knew how to bear. She might not give way to grief in the presence of the world; but there were lonely moments when she yielded to it in all its bitterness. The sea, calm to-night, as spread out before her, grey and dull, for the sunset glow had left it: did that sea contain the body of him whom she had loved more than life? To her left rose the Friar's Keep. Did that Keep, with its dark tales and superstitions, conceal the mystery? She fully believed so. From the very first, the description of the building had taken hold of her mind, and left its dread there. It was *there* she must look for the traces of her husband's fate. Yes, she believed that the grim walls held him, not the restless sea.

"Oh, Anthony! my ill-fated husband!" she cried, raising her clasped hands in her distress, and speaking through blinding tears, "may the good God help me to bring your fate to light!"

The shades of evening were deepening. Fishermen, with their wives and children, were wending their way homewards after the Sunday evening's walk—the one walk taken together in the seven days. Two of the Grey Ladies came down from the cliff and went towards the Nunnery: Madame Guise, who by this time had made acquaintance with some of the inhabitants, wondered whether any one was ill in the cottages there.

Once more, as she stood at the casement window, Charlotte Guise asked herself whether she was justified in entering Greylands' Rest under a false aspect—justified even by circumstances. She had revolved the question in her mind many times during the past few days, and the answer had always been, as it was now, in the affirmative. And she was of a straightforward, honourable nature; although the reader may

be disposed to think the contrary. That Mr. Castlemaine had taken her husband's life; taken it in malice and wickedness, in order to retain possession of Greylands' Rest, she never for a moment doubted: she religiously believed that the mission of tracking out this crime was laid upon her by Heaven: and she considered herself justified in taking any steps that might forward her in the work. The opportunity having been offered her in so marked a manner—as she looked upon it—of becoming an inmate of Mr. Castlemaine's home, she could not hesitate to embrace it. And yet, though she never faltered in her course, though an angel from heaven would scarcely have stopped her entrance, believing, as she did, that the way had been specially opened for her, every now and again qualms of conscience pricked her sharply, and she hated the whole proceeding.

The sea became more grey; the evening star grew bright in the sky; people had gone home and the doors were shut. Madame Guise, tired with the weary hours, sad with her own reflections, put on her bonnet and mantle to take a short stroll to the beach. Mrs. Bent happened to meet her as she gained the passage below. The landlady was looking so unusually cross that Madame Guise noticed it.

"I have been giving a word of a sort to Mr. Harry Castlemaine," she explained, as they entered her sitting-room. "You be quiet, John Bent: what I see right to do, I shall do. Mr. Harry will go too far in that quarter, if he does not mind."

"Young men like to talk to pretty girls all the world over; they did in my time, I know, and they do in this," was John's quiet answer, as he rose from his fireside chair at his guest's entrance. "But I don't see, wife, that you've any good reason for pouncing upon Mr. Harry as he was going by to his home and saying what you did."

"Prevention's better than cure," observed Mrs. Bent, shortly. "As to young men liking to talk to pretty girls, that's all very well when they are equals in life; but when it comes to a common sailor's daughter and a gentleman, it's a different thing."

"Jane Hallet's father was not a common sailor!"

"He was not much above it," retorted Mrs. Bent. "Because the Grey Sisters educated her and made much of her, would

you raise her into a lady? You never had common-sense, John Bent, and never will have."

"I call Miss Hallet a lady," said John.

"You might call the moon a lantern if you chose, but you couldn't make other folks do it. As to Jane, she is too pretty to be followed by Mr. Harry Castlemaine. Why, he must have been walking with her nearly ever since tea!"

"He intends no harm, Dorothy, I'll answer for it."

"Harm sometimes comes without intention, John Bent. Mr. Harry's as thoughtless and random as a March hare. I've seen what I have seen: and Jane Hallet had better keep herself in future out of his company."

"Well, your speaking to him did no good, wife. And it was not respectful of you."

"Good! it's not likely it would do good with him," conceded Mrs. Bent. "He turns everything into ridicule. Did you hear how he began about my Sunday cap, asking for the pattern of it, and setting Molly off on the grin! She nearly dropped the scuttle of coals she was bringing in—— Good-evening then, ma'am, for the present, if you are going for your little stroll."

Madame Guise, leaving her host and hostess to settle their difference touching Mr. Harry Castlemaine, went to the beach and walked about. The shades grew deeper; the stars came out brightly: night was upon the earth when she retraced her steps. Thinking of her little one, she did not go into the inn, but walked past the Grey Nunnery: she knew she should not see the child, but it was a satisfaction only to look at the window of the room that contained her. Soon Madame Guise came to the gate of the chapel ruins; and some impulse prompted her to open it and enter.

She crossed the ruins, and stood looking out on the sea. It was low water; she saw the rude steps by which the little beach below might be gained, but would not have liked to venture down. The steps were hazardous even for a strong man, and perhaps were not used from one month's end to another: and slime and sea-weed made them slippery. After she had gazed long, she turned to the Friar's Keep, and made her way into it by the gothic doorway, between the once firm walls.

It was dark! By what she could make out, when her sight grew accustomed to the gloom, she seemed to be amongst the

pillared arches of some cloisters. Whilst striving to pierce the mysteries, taking a step this way and that, and trembling lest she should see the ghost said to haunt the place, a ghostly sound, like the fluttering of large wings, rose above in the arches. Poor Charlotte Guise, superstitious by nature and education, and still young, was seized with a terror too great to scream. Was it the spirit of her husband, striving to communicate with her, she wondered—and, oh, blame her not too greatly. She had been reared in the fear of "revenants;" she earnestly believed that the dead were sometimes permitted to revisit the earth. Silence ensued, and her terror grew somewhat less intense. "Is your grave here, Anthony?" she murmured; "do you lie in some corner of this lonely place, away from the eye of man? Oh, hear me while I repeat my vow to search out this dreadful mystery; and bring home to Mr. Castlemaine——"

A greater noise than before; an awful fluttering and flapping above her head. She screamed now, terrified almost to death. The echoes repeated her cry; and the rushing wings, with another sort of scream, not half so shrill as hers, went out through the broken wall and flew out to sea.

Without once realizing that she had only invaded the precincts of some night-bird and disturbed its solitude; with her face as white as death, and her limbs trembling as though she had suddenly been seized with ague, she made her way to the entrance-gate again; passed through it, and so got away from the Friar's Keep.

CHAPTER XVI.

AT GREYLANDS' REST.

"Because Ethel understands French as well as you do, that's no reason why I should. If you tell me in French what I have to do, of course I can't do it, for I don't know a word you say."

It was Tuesday, the first morning of the studies, Madame Guise having entered the previous day. She, Ethel, and Flora were seated round the table in the schoolroom, a small apartment looking upon the kitchen-garden, an old carpet on the

floor, painted chairs, and a square piano against the wall opposite the fire. Ethel was copying music. Madame Guise was endeavouring to ascertain how far Miss Flora had advanced in her studies, with a view to arranging their course in future, speaking in French, and requiring the replies to be in French also. But the young lady obstinately persisted in making them in English.

"Whatever you do, Madame Guise, please speak *always* to Flora in French," had been Mrs. Castlemaine's first charge to the new governess. "Above all things, I wish her to be a good French scholar, and to speak it as fluently as Miss Reene does." But here, at the very outset, Miss Flora was objecting to the French, and protesting she could not understand it.

Madame Guise hesitated. She did not choose to be met by wilful disobedience; on the other hand, to issue her mandates in an unknown language would simply be waste of time. She turned her eyes questioningly on Ethel.

"I am not quite sure, madame, one way or the other," said Ethel, replying in French. "Flora ought to be able to understand it; and to speak it a little too; but she has always been inattentive. Miss Oldham and the governesses before her did not speak French as you do: and perhaps they were not very particular as to whether Flora spoke it."

"How is it that you speak it so well?" asked madame.

"I? Oh, I had a French nurse when I was a child, and then a French governess; and to finish my education I went to Paris for two years."

"All the three governesses I have had here did not speak French to me," interrupted Flora, resentfully. "Not one of them."

"Have you had three governesses? That is a great many, considering you are yet young," observed madame, in English.

"They were all bad," said the girl.

"Or were you a bad pupil? You must be a better one with me."

Ethel's shapely head, with its bright dark hair, was bent over her copying again: she said nothing. Madame Guise determined to speak in English to the child for at least this morning, until the studies should be put in train.

"We will begin with your English grammar"—taking up

the untidy book. "How far have you advanced in it, Miss Flora?"

"I don't like grammar."

"How far have you advanced in it?" equably pursued madame.

"I don't recollect."

"To begin English grammar again," spoke madame, addressing herself, and making a note on paper with a pencil.

"I shan't begin it again."

"You will not say to me I shall or I shan't; you will do what I please," quietly corrected madame. "This is your English History. What reign are you in?"

Miss Flora had her elbows on the table, her hands under her chin, and her pretty face pushed out defiantly opposite madame. The patches of plaister were nearly all gone; her light curls tied back with a black ribbon, hung low behind. She wore a black frock and white pinafore.

"Which of the king's reigns are you in?" pursued madame.

"Not in any. I know them all. Charles the Second was beheaded; Henry the Eighth had ten wives: Guy Faux discovered the gunpowder plot; and Elizabeth boxed people's ears."

"Oh," said madame, "I think we shall have to begin *that* again. Can you spell?"

"I can't spell at all. I hate it. Mamma says I need not learn to spell."

"I fancy that cannot be true. How will you write letters if you cannot spell?"

"I don't want to write letters?"

"Flora!" put in Ethel warningly.

The girl turned angrily on Ethel. "Nobody asked *you* to speak: mind your copying."

"Mind your manners," said Ethel, nodding to her.

"Not for you, or for anybody else in this room."

"It is very unpleasant to hear young ladies say these rude things," interposed madame. "As your governess, Miss Flora, I shall not permit it."

"That's what my other governesses would say," retorted Flora. "It made no difference to me."

"If the other governesses did not do their duty by you, it is

no reason why I should not do mine," said madame. "Your papa has charged me with forming your manners; if I have trouble in doing so I am to appeal to him."

Flora was silent. The one authority she feared, in the house or out of it, was her father's. *He* would not be trifled with, however her mother might be.

"I hate governesses, Madame Guise. I should like to know what they were invented for?"

"To teach ignorant and refractory children to become young ladies," spoke madame, who did not seem in the least to lose her temper. Flora did not like the calmness: it promised badly for the future. It was so totally unlike her experience of former governesses. *They* were either driven wild, or had subsided into a state of apathy.

"I drove those other governesses away, and I'll drive you. I'll never do anything you tell me. I won't learn and I won't practise."

"The less you learn, the more persistently I shall stay on to make you," said madame, quite equably. "A lesson that you do not get by heart to-day, you will have to get to-morrow: the studies broken off this week, must be completed next. As to your trying to drive me away, it will be labour lost; I simply tell you I am not to be driven. If there is anything I like, and for which I think I have an especial fitness, it is ruling refractory children. We shall see which will be stronger, Miss Flora, you or I."

"Once, when one of my governesses wanted to *make* me learn, I had a fever. Mamma said it was all her fault."

"Very good," said madame. "We will risk the fever. If you have one, I will nurse you through it. I am a capital nurse."

Ethel laughed. "The fever was a headache, Flora; you brought it on with crying."

"You story-teller! I did have a fever. I lay in bed and had broth."

"Yes, for a day. Why, you have never had a fever in your life. Mr. Parker saw you and brought some medicine; you would not take it and got up."

"Ugh! you old tell-tale!"

"Come to my side, Miss Flora," spoke madame. "You will

stand here and read a little French and English, that I may see how you read. And I must tell you that if we have not got through this morning what we want to get through and put the studies in order, I shall not allow you to go out this afternoon, and I shall request that you have no dinner. Instead of that, you will stay in this room with me. Mind! I never break my word."

After a few moments' delay, the young lady moved round. Probably she saw that her new mistress was *not* one to break her word. And, thus, a beginning made, the morning wore away rather better than its commencement had promised. There never lived a child with better abilities than Flora Castlemaine: it was only the will to use them that was wanting. She had been brought up to exercise her own will and disregard that of others, and there cannot be worse training for a child.

Putting aside the difficulties attending the instruction and management of Miss Flora, Madame Guise found the residence at Greylands' Rest not at all an unpleasant one. Little did Mr. Castlemaine imagine that the agreeable, though always sad young lady, who was so efficient an instructress for the young plague of the house, was his ill-fated nephew's widow. He was somewhat taken back when he heard that Madame Guise had placed her child at the Grey Nunnery, and knitted his brow in displeasure. However, the child's being there could make no difference to him; it was the Sisterhood he wanted away, not the child.

Charlotte Guise never went out during the day—excepting on Sundays to church. Ethel would try to coax her abroad in the afternoons, but hitherto she had not succeeded. In the evening, after Flora was done with, madame would put her bonnet on and stroll out alone: sometimes to the Nunnery to see her child, whose enforced absence only made her dearer to her mother's heart.

"Why will you not go out with me?" asked Ethel one afternoon, when she and Madame Guise rose from the piano in the red room—for the old square piano in the schoolroom was for the benefit of the untrained fingers of Miss Flora only. "See how pleasant everything looks! It is quite spring weather now."

"Yes, it is spring weather, but I feel a little cold always, and I don't care to go out," answered Madame Guise. "I will do so when summer comes."

They sat down before the French window, Ethel opening it to the pleasant air. Madame Guise had been wishing ever since she entered the house to put a question to this fair young girl, whom she had already learned to love. But she had not yet dared to do so: conscience was always suggesting fears of her identity being discovered: and now that she did speak, it was abruptly.

"Have any tidings yet been heard of the young man said to have been lost in the Friar's Keep?"

"No, not any," replied Ethel.

"Is it true, think you, that he was killed?"

Ethel Reene flushed painfully: she could not forget what she had overheard John Bent say.

"Oh, I hope not. Of course, his disappearance is very strange; more than strange. But if—if anything did happen to him that night, it might have been by accident."

"I heard about the matter when I was at the Dolphin," observed Madame Guise, as if wishing to give a reason for alluding to it. "It took much hold upon my interest; it seemed so strange and sad. Did you ever see that Mr. Anthony, Ethel?"

"Yes, I saw him twice, and I grew to like him. Miss Castlemaine of Stilborough liked him also: and I think the mystery of his loss has lain heavily upon her."

Ethel rose. The disappearance was a subject she did not care to dwell upon. Unable to believe Mr. Castlemaine otherwise than innocent, she yet saw that a prejudice had arisen against him.

"What shall you do with yourself all day to-morrow?" asked Ethel.

"I shall take holiday," replied Madame Guise, flushing.

For on the morrow the whole of the family were going from home, having promised to spend the day with some friends who lived near Newerton.

The flush had been caused by Charlotte Guise's self-consciousness. True, she would take holiday on the morrow from her duties; but she was purposing to use the day, or part of it,

in endeavouring to make some discovery. Twelve days had she been in the house now, and she was no farther advanced than when she entered it. She had seen Mr. Castlemaine daily; she had conversed with him, dined and taken other meals in his company; but for all the enlightenment she had obtained as to the doings of that ill-fated February night, he and she might as well have been far apart as the poles. It was not by going on in this way that she could hope to obtain any clue to the past: the past to which she had vowed to devote herself.

The morning rose brightly, and the family went off after breakfast in the carriage, Harry sitting the box with the coachman. Madame Guise was left alone.

A feverish desire had been upon her to enter Mr. Castlemaine's study, in which he kept the accounts relating to the estate, and wrote his letters. In this room he passed many hours daily, sitting in it sometimes far into the night. Charlotte Guise had an impression that if she could find any record of her lost husband, it would be there. But she had never yet obtained as much as a glimpse of its interior: the room was considered sacred to Mr. Castlemaine, and the family seldom approached it.

Two or three of the women-servants had obtained permission to absent themselves that day to visit their friends; and the house was comparatively deserted. Madame Guise, looking forth from her chamber, found all silent and still; the servants who remained at home were shut up in the remote kitchens. Now was her time; now, if ever.

The corridor was spacious. It ran down two sides of the house, and most of the bed-chambers opened from it. Mr. Castlemaine's study was the middle room in the side corridor; madame's bedroom was nearly opposite the study; the one beyond hers was Harry Castlemaine's.

Standing outside her door, in the silence, with a flushed face and shortened breath, not liking the work she was about to do, but believing it to have been thrown upon her, she at length softly crossed the corridor and opened the outer door leading to the study. A short, dark passage, and there was another door. This was locked, but the key was in it; she turned the key, and entered the room. Entered it with some undefined feeling of disappointment, for it was bare and empty.

We are all apt to form ideas of places and things as yet unseen. Charlotte Guise had pictured Mr. Castlemaine's study as a spacious apartment filled with furniture, and littered with papers. What she saw was a small square room, and no earthly thing in it, excepting two tables, some chairs, and a bureau against the wall: or what would have been called in her own land a large secretaire, or office desk. She gazed around her with a blank expression.

The tables and chairs were bare: the bureau was locked. She tried it; but the closed lid was firm as adamant.

"If any record of him exists, it is here," she murmured to herself. "I must contrive some means of opening it."

She could not do that to-day. It would have to be done with a false key, she supposed; and that she had not in her possession. Before quitting the room, she approached the window, and looked out cautiously. At the sea rolling in the distance; the Friar's Keep opposite; the fair green lands lying between it and Greylands' Rest. Charlotte Guise shuddered as a thought crossed her.

"If he did indeed kill my poor husband and has laid him to rest in the Friar's Keep, how can he bear to occupy this room, with that building ever before him to remind him of the deed?"

The day was before her: it was not yet twelve o'clock. Disappointed with her failure, she put on her things to go out: there was nothing to remain in for. At the last moment it occurred to her that she would go to Stilborough. She wanted to make some purchases; for she had not brought an extensive wardrobe from France, either for herself or her child. Hastily attiring herself, she told Miles she should not be in to dinner, and started.

And so, just as Anthony Castlemaine had once, and once only, set out for the market-town, did his poor young wife—nay, his widow—set out now. She was a good walker, and, so far, enjoyed the journey and the sweet spring day. She saw the same objects of interest that he had seen: the tall trees, now budding into life: the country carts and waggons; the rough milestones; the two or three farm-houses lying back amongst their barns and orchards. Thus she reached Stilborough, and did her commissions.

It was late when she returned to Greylands; five o'clock; and she was terribly tired. By the time she reached the Dolphin, she could hardly drag one foot before the other. To walk three miles on a fine day is not much; but to go about afterwards from shop to shop, and then to walk back again is something more. Mrs. Bent, standing at the inn door, saw her, brought her in, and set her down to a substantial tea-table. She told the landlady she had been to Stilborough to make purchases. They would come by the van for her on the morrow, and would be left at the Dolphin, if the Dolphin would kindly take them in.

"With pleasure," said Mrs. Bent. "Ned shall take the parcels up to Greylands' Rest."

What with the welcome rest, and Mrs. Bent's hospitable tea and gossip, Madame Guise sat longer than she had intended. It was nearly dark when she went over to the Nunnery—for she had brought a toy and some bon-bons for Marie. The Grey Sisters received her as kindly as usual; but they told her the little girl did not seem very well; and Madame Guise went upstairs to look at her.

Marie was in her little bed by the side of Sister Betsy's. She seemed restless and feverish. Poor Charlotte Guise began to think that perhaps this climate did not agree with her as well as their own. Taking off her things, she sat down to stay with the child.

"Mrs. Castlemaine said it would be quite midnight before they returned home, as they were to make a very long day, so I am in no hurry for an hour or two," she observed. "Miles will think I am lost; but I will tell him how it is."

"Has your little one ever had measles?" asked Sister Mona.

"Measles?" repeated Madame Guise, puzzled for the moment. "Oh no. She has never had anything."

"Then I think, but I am not sure, that she is sickening for them now."

"Mon Dieu!" cried the mother, in consternation.

"It is nothing," said the Sister. "We have nursed dozens of children, and brought them well through it. In a week, little Marie will be about again."

But Madame Guise, unfamiliar with these light ailments, and terribly anxious for her only child, was not easily reassured.

She stayed with her as long as she dared, and begged that Mr. Parker might be sent for in the morning should Marie be no better.

It was past eleven, and late to go home; nevertheless Charlotte Guise took the lonely road past the Friar's Keep and up Chapel Lane. The way had a fascination for her. Since she had been at Greylands' Rest, in returning from the Nunnery in the evening she had always chosen it. What she expected to see or hear, that could bear upon her husband's fate, she knew not; but the vague idea ever lay upon her that she might light upon something. Could she have done it without suspicion, three parts of her time would have been spent pacing about before the chapel ruins, just as John Bent had paced to and fro the night he was waiting for his guest.

It was very lonely. All the village had long ago been in bed. The stars were bright; the night was clear. Looking over the chapel ruins, she could see the lights of a distant vessel out at sea. Under the hedge, in the very self-same spot where her husband and John Bent had halted that fatal night, did she now halt, and gaze across at the Keep, Chapel Lane being close upon her left hand.

"No, they could not have been mistaken," ran her thoughts. "If Mr. Castlemaine came down the lane now and crossed over, I should know him unmistakably—and that night was lighter than this, for the moon, they say, was never brighter. Then why, unless he were guilty, should Mr. Castlemaine deny that he was there?"

Glancing up at the windows with a shudder, almost fearing she might see the apparition of the Grey Monk, Madame Guise turned up Chapel Lane. At such moments, trifles serve to unstring the nerves of a timid woman. Sounds struck on Madame Guise's ear, and she drew back, trembling, into the grove of shrubs and trees skirting one side of the lane.

"Gently, now; gently, Bess," cried a voice not far from her. "You shall go your own pace in less than five minutes, old girl. Gently now."

And to Charlotte Guise's astonishment, she saw Commodore Teague's spring-cart issue from the dark turning that led from the Hutt, the Commodore driving. When almost close to Madame Guise, the Commodore pulled up with an exclamation.

"The devil take it! I've forgot to lock the shed-door. Stand still, old girl; stand still, Bess."

He got down and ran back. The well-trained animal stood perfectly still. In a few moments he was back again, had mounted, and was driving slowly away in the direction of Newerton.

"What can be taking him abroad at this hour?" madame wondered to herself.

But the encounter, though it had been a silent one, and on the man's part unsuspected, had served somewhat to restore her courage: and with a swift step, Charlotte Guise proceeded on her way up Chapel Lane.

CHAPTER XVII.

OPENING THE BUREAU.

GREYLANDS' CLIFF was high and sloping: and the huts of the fishermen, nestling on its side, rendered it very picturesque. Many a lover of art and nature, seeking a subject for his pencil, had sketched the scene; and a few had sent forth pictures that had charmed the world.

The two highest cottages were superior to the rest. Even they were not built on the summit; but close under it. They stood almost side by side; a rock jutting out between them. The walls were white: and at the side of one of these cottages there was a small square piece of ground. Miss Hallet, to whom the cottage belonged, had planted a few flowers, a few shrubs, and sweet herbs, and so nursed the little spot into a miniature garden. Miss Hallet herself was seated just within the open door of the dwelling, darning a pillow-case. The door opened upon this room; a prettily furnished parlour. The kitchen was behind it; and two good bed-chambers and a smaller room were above. It was regarded as quite an important house by the poorer dwellers on the cliff, and Miss Hallet was looked up to as quite a lady. Having a small but sufficient income, she lived quietly and peaceably, mixing little with other people.

Through family misfortunes she had been deprived of a home

in early life, and had taken a situation as half companion, half lady's-maid. The lady she served bequeathed her sufficient to live upon. Miss Hallet had also saved money of her own; she came to Greylands, her native place, bought the cottage on the cliff, and settled herself in it. Her brother, like herself, had had to turn to and support himself. He entered the merchant service, and in time rose to command a vessel trading to the coast of Spain. But he never got beyond that: and one stormy night the unfortunate vessel sank with himself and all hands. He left two orphan children unprovided for, a son and daughter; Miss Hallet adopted them, and they came home to her at Greylands. The boy, George, she sent to a good day-school at Stilborough; Jane went to the Grey Sisters. George took to the sea; in spite of all his aunt's opposition. Perhaps the liking was innate, and he was always about in boats and on the beach when at Greylands. He at length put himself on board Tom Dance's boat, and said he would be a fisherman, and nothing else. In vain Miss Hallet pointed out that he was superior to anything of the sort, and ought to look out for a higher calling in life. George would not listen. Quitting his aunt's roof—for he grew tired of the contentions she continually provoked—he went to lodge in the village, and apparently made a good living. But the treacherous sea took him, just as it had taken his father. One night during a storm, a ship was sighted in distress: Tom Dance, who was as good-hearted as he was reckless, put off in his boat with George Hallet to the rescue, and George never came back again. Handsome, light-hearted George Hallet was drowned. That was nearly two years ago. He was just twenty years of age; and was said to have already been given a share in Tom's Dance's earnings. Tom Dance owned his own substantial boat; and his hauls of fish were good; no doubt profitable also, for he was always flush of money. His son, a silent young man, was his partner now, and went out in the boat with him as George Hallet had done. They lived in one of the cottages on the beach. Old Mrs. Dance, Tom's mother, had her dwelling in a solitary place under the perpendicular cliff: not on the village side, but facing the sea. It was a lonely spot, inaccessible at times when the tides were high. Tom Dance, who was generous to his mother, and kept her well, would have had her quit it for a

more sociable habitation: but the old woman was attached to her homestead, and would not leave it.

Miss Hallet finished darning one hole, and turned the pillow-case about in search of another. She was a tall, fair, angular lady of fifty, with a cold, hard expression; three or four prim flat curls of grey hair peeped out on her forehead from beneath her cap; tortoiseshell spectacles were stretched across her well-shaped nose. She had a fawn-coloured woollen shawl crossed about her for warmth—for, though a fine spring day, it was scarcely the weather yet for one of her age to sit exposed to the open air.

"Why, this must have been cut!"

The spectacles had discovered an almost imperceptible hole, with edges so keen and close that it could not have been the result of natural wear and tear. Miss Hallet drew in her thin lips grimly.

"And since the wash too!" she continued, when the gaze was over. "Jane must know something of this, for she helped the woman to fold. Jane is frightfully careless."

Threading a fresh needleful of the soft, fine darning cotton, she was applying herself to the damage, when footsteps were heard ascending the narrow zigzag path. Another minute, and Tom Dance's son loomed into view; a short, sturdy, well-meaning, but shy and silent youth of twenty.

"Father's duty, Miss Hallet, and he has sent up this fish, if you'll please to accept him," said the young man, showing a good-sized fish resting on a wicker-tray. Miss Hallet was charmed. Her hard face almost relaxed into a smile.

"Dear me, what a beautiful fish! How good of your father, Wally! Always thinking of somebody! Give him my best thanks. You have just got in, I suppose?"

"Just ten minutes ago," responded Wally. "Been out two tides."

"Well, I wonder your father does not begin to think more of his ease—so well off as he must be! The night seems the same to him for work as the day."

"One catches the best fish under the moon," shortly remarked the young man, as he handed over the wicker-tray.

Miss Hallet took it into the house, and brought it back to him without the fish. Mr. Walter Dance accepted the tray

with a silent nod, and sped down the steep path at a rate, that, to unaccustomed eyes, might have seemed to jeopardize his neck.

Barely had Miss Hallet taken up her sewing again, when another visitor appeared. These footsteps were lighter and softer than the young man's, and their owner was seen almost as soon as heard. A dark-haired, quick-speaking young woman in black. It was Harriet, waiting-maid to Mrs. Castlemaine.

"Is your niece at home, Miss Hallet?"

"No. She's gone to Stilborough. How are you, Harriet?"

"Oh, I'm all right, thank you. What a cliff this is to climb!—almost takes one's breath away. Gone to Stilborough? Well, that's a bother!"

"What did you want with her?"

"Has she done any of those han'kerchers, do you know?" returned the young woman, without directly replying to the question.

"I can't say. I know she has begun them. Would you like to come in and sit down?"

"I've no time for sitting down. My missis has sent me here on the spur of the moment: and when she sends one out on an errand for herself one had best not linger, you know. Besides, I must get back to dress my ladies."

"Oh, must you," indifferently remarked Miss Hallet; who rarely betrayed curiosity as to her neighbours' doings, or encouraged gossip.

"They are all off to a dinner-party at Stilborough; and missis took it into her head just now that she'd use one of her new fine cambric han'kerchers," continued Harriet. "So she sent me off here to get one."

"But Mrs. Castlemaine cannot be short of fine handkerchiefs!" cried Miss Hallet.

"Short!—why, she's a whole drawer full. It was just a fancy for a new thing; that's all."

"Well, I do not know whether one is done, Harriet. Jane has been working at one of them last night; but I did not notice whether she finished it."

"Can't you look, please, Miss Hallet?"

Miss Hallet rose and went upstairs. She came back empty-handed.

"I don't see the handkerchiefs in Jane's room, Harriet. I dare say she has locked them up in her work-drawer: she has taken to locking the drawer lately, I've noticed. If you could wait a few minutes, she might be in: she won't be long now."

"But I can't wait; they start at five," was the girl's answer: "and missis and Miss Ethel have both got to be dressed. So I'll say good-afternoon, ma'am."

"Good-afternoon," repeated Miss Hallet. "Should Jane return in time, if she happens to have finished one of the handkerchiefs, she shall bring it up."

The young woman turned away with a quick step, though not quite as quickly as Walter Dance had disappeared. By-and-by, quite an hour later, Jane Hallet came in.

A slender, lady-like girl of nineteen; with a fair, gentle face, mild blue eyes, light hair, and almost child-like features. Jane's good looks, of which she was no doubt conscious, and Jane's propensity for dressing too much were a source of continual vexation to Miss Hallet. Jane wore a dark blue merino dress, a very pretty grey cloak, with a hood and tassels, and a straw bonnet trimmed with blue. Miss Hallet groaned audibly.

"And you must walk off in all those best things to-day, Jane! Just to go to the wool-shop at Stilborough! I wonder what will become of you!"

"It was so fine a day, aunt," came the cheerful, apologetic answer. "I have not injured them."

"You've done them no good. Are any of those handkerchiefs of Mrs. Castlemaine's finished?" resumed the aunt, after a pause.

"One is."

"Then you must go up at once with it to Greylands' Rest. Don't take off your cloak—unless, indeed, you like to change it for your old one, which would be the right thing to do," added Miss Hallet, snappishly. "And your bonnet, too!"

Jane stood still for a moment, and something like a cloud passed over her face. She did not particularly care to go to Greylands' Rest.

"I am tired with my walk, aunt."

"That can't be helped: you must take the handkerchief all the same," said Miss Hallet. And she explained that she had promised to send one if it were done.

"You will be in time, Jane: it is hardly half-past four. The maid said they were to start at five."

Jane went up to her chamber; a room that she took care to make as pretty as she could. Taking a key from her pocket, she opened the top long drawer of a chest that stood near the bed, and lifted out the paper of handkerchiefs. Half-a-dozen handkerchiefs of the finest and softest cambric, that Mrs. Castlemaine had given her to hem-stitch.

Any little work of this sort Jane Hallet was glad to undertake. The money helped to buy her clothes. Otherwise she was dependent upon her aunt. The Grey Ladies had taught her all descriptions of fine needlework. When she had none to do—and she did not have it often—she filled up her leisure time in knitting lambs'-wool socks for a shop at Stilborough. There was no necessity for doing this, and Miss Hallet did not altogether approve of it; but it gave Jane a greater feeling of independence.

Snatching a moment to look into the glass and put her hair in order, Jane went down with the handkerchief, folded in thin white paper. All the girl's instincts were nice: she was in fact too much of a lady for her position.

"I thought you might have changed those smart things for your everyday ones," crossly spoke Miss Hallet, as Jane went through the sitting-room. "Mrs. Castlemaine will look askance at your finery."

"There was no time, aunt," replied Jane, a sudden flush dyeing her face, as she hastened out.

She went down the cliff, past the Grey Nunnery, and so up Chapel Lane—which was the back way to Greylands' Rest. It was not her wish or intention to see Mrs. Castlemaine, if she could avoid it; or any of the family. Presenting herself at the back-door, she asked for Harriet. One of the other servants took her into a small parlour, and said she would tell the lady's-maid. Five o'clock had struck before Harriet bustled in.

"The han'kercher, is it? Mrs. Castlemaine will be glad. When she sets her mind on a thing, she don't change it. Come along, Jane; she wants to see you."

No opportunity was afforded of saying no, and Jane followed Harriet down the passages. Mrs. Castlemaine, her rich black silk dinner-dress covered by a large warm shawl, stood in the

hall. Ethel Reene, in black net and white ribbons, and wearing her scarlet cloak, was also there. The carriage waited outside. Jane went forward timidly, her face turning pale and red alternately.

"I just want to see it before I take it," said Mrs. Castlemaine, holding out her hand for the handkerchief. "Is it much creased? Oh, I see; it is very nice. How well you have kept it, Jane! Here, Harriet, I don't want this one now."

She tossed back an embroidered handkerchief to the maid, and swept out to the carriage. Ethel smiled at Jane as she followed her step-mother.

"I'm sure it is very good of you, Jane, to come up with it," she said, feeling in her sensitiveness that Mrs. Castlemaine had not given one word of thanks to the girl.

Mr. Castlemaine came down, an overcoat on his arm. He nodded pleasantly to Jane as he passed, and inquired after Miss Hallet. Miles and Harriet stood in the porch watching the carriage away. Jane stood a little behind, just within the hall.

"I thought Mr. Harry was going," observed Harriet. "Why hasn't he gone?"

"Don't know," said Miles. "One never can be certain of Mr. Harry—whether he goes anywhere or whether he doesn't go."

"Perhaps he has walked on," remarked Harriet carelessly, as she turned round. "Jane, you'll stay and take a dish o' tea, now you are here. We are just going to have it."

But Jane hastily declined. No persuasion, apparently, would induce her to accept the invitation; and she departed at once. Half-an-hour later Madame Guise and her pupil came home: they had been out for a long walk.

"Have they all gone?" inquired madame of one of the housemaids.

"Oh dear, yes, ma'am. Half-an-hour ago."

Now, this answer deceived Madame Guise. She knew the invitation had been accepted by Mr. and Mrs. Castlemaine, their son, and Ethel. She supposed they would all go to it together: and in saying to the servant, "Have they all gone," she included the four, and accepted the answer accordingly.

She and Flora took tea together. The child was growing somewhat more tractable than she had been, but it was only a

very slight improvement as yet. Flora was always better when her mother was away; and Madame Guise had no trouble with her this evening. She even went to bed at the appointed hour, eight o'clock, without rebellion, after a regalement of what she was particularly fond of—bread-and-jam.

Madame took a light supper that evening when Flora took her tea, and afterwards wrote a letter. At nine o'clock she rang the bell to say she was going up to her room for the night, feeling tired, and should require nothing more. Miles, who had answered the bell, saw her depart with her candle. He put out the sitting-room lights, and went back to the kitchen. His master and mistress were not expected home before half-past eleven.

In her room stood Charlotte Guise, white as a sheet. She was contemplating a deed that night, from which, in spite of what she deemed her justification, she shrank in horror. It was no less a step than opening with a false key the private bureau of Mr. Castlemaine.

Some little time, very nearly a fortnight, had elapsed since that walk of hers to Stilborough; and Marie had had the measles—"very kindly," as Mr. Parker and the Grey Sisters expressed it—and was well again. With a plausible story about losing her keys to a Stilborough locksmith that day, madame had obtained from him a key that would undo, if necessary, half the locks in Mr. Castlemaine's house. No opportunity had presented itself for using it until now. Such an occasion as this, when the house was deserted by all, excepting the servants, might not speedily occur again.

She stood in her chamber, trembling and nervous, the light from the candle reflected on her face. The staircase clock struck a quarter-past nine, and her heart beat faster as she heard it. It was the signal she had been waiting for.

For the servants would now be settled at their supper, and were not likely soon to get up from it. Nine o'clock was the nominal hour for the meal: but, as she chanced to know, they seldom sat down to it much before a quarter past. With the house free, they would not hurry themselves to-night. Half-an-hour—nay, an hour, she knew she might freely reckon upon whilst they were shut up in the comfortable kitchen.

Charlotte Guise opened the door and stood to listen. Not

a sound save the ticking of the clock broke the stillness. She was quite alone. Flora was fast asleep in her room in the front corridor, next to Mrs. Castlemaine's chamber, for she had been in to see, and had taken the precaution of turning the key on the child for safety: it would not do to be interrupted by *her*. Yet another minute she stood listening, candle in hand. Then, swiftly crossing the corridor, she stole into the study through the double doors. A fear had been upon her that she might find the second door a stumbling-block, as Mr. Castlemaine sometimes locked it when he went out. It was open to-night, and she passed through it.

The same orderly room that she had seen before. No papers lay about, no deeds were left out that could be of use to her. Three books were piled upon the side-table; a newspaper lay on a chair; and that was all. The fire had long gone out; on the mantelpiece was a box of matches.

Putting down the candle, Charlotte Guise took out her key, and tried the bureau. It opened at once. She swung back the heavy lid and waited a moment to recover herself: her lips were white, her breath came painfully. Apart from the baseness, the dishonour of the act, which was very present to her mind, what if she were to be caught at it?

Papers were there en masse. Drawers and pigeon-holes seemed full of them. So far as she could judge from a short examination—and she did not dare to linger—these papers referred to business transactions, to sales of goods and commercial matters—which she rather wondered at, but did not understand. But of deeds she could see none.

What did Charlotte Guise expect to find? What did she promise herself by this secret search? In truth, she could not have told. She wanted to get some record of her husband's fate, some proof that should compromise the Master of Greylands. She would also have been glad to find some document that should declare how Greylands' Rest had been really left by old Anthony Castlemaine: whether to his son Basil or to James. If to Basil, why, there would be a proof—as she, poor thing, deemed it—of the manner in which James Castlemaine had dealt with his nephew, and its motive.

No, there was nothing. Opening this bundle of papers, rapidly glancing into that, she could find absolutely nothing to

help her: and in the revulsion of feeling which the disappointment caused, she said to herself how worse than foolish she had been to expect to find anything: how utterly devoid of reason she must be, to suppose Mr. Castlemaine would preserve mementos of an affair so dangerous. And where he kept his law papers, or parchments relating to his estate, she could not tell, but certainly they were not in the bureau, unless there were secret places to which she knew not how to penetrate.

Not daring to remain longer, for nearly half-an-hour must have elapsed, she replaced the things as she had found them, as far as she could remember. All was done excepting one small drawer. It had contained only a few receipted bills: one from a saddler, one from a coach-builder, and so on. The drawer was shallow; and, in closing it, the bills were forced out again. Charlotte Guise, in her hurry, pulled the drawer forwards too forcibly, and pulled it out of its frame.

Had it chanced by accident—this little contretemps? Ah, no. When do these trifles pregnant with events of moment, occur by chance? Within the drawer, appeared a narrow, closed compartment, opening with a slide. Charlotte drew the slide back, and saw within it a folded letter and some small article wrapped in paper.

The letter, which she opened and read, proved to be the one written by Basil Castlemaine on his death-bed—the letter that had been brought over by young Anthony, and given to his uncle. There was nothing much to note in it—excepting that Basil assumed throughout that the estate was his, and would be his son's after him. Folding it again, she opened the paper: and there shone out a diamond ring that flashed in the candle-light.

Charlotte Guise took it up and let it fall again. Let it fall in a sort of terror, and staggered to a chair half fainting. For it was her husband's ring.

The ring that Anthony had worn always on the little finger of his left hand: the ring that he had on when he quitted Gap. It was the same ring that John Bent and his wife had often noticed and admired; the ring that was undoubtedly on his hand when he followed Mr. Castlemaine that ill-fated night into the Friar's Keep. His poor wife recognized it instantly: she knew it by its peculiar setting.

To her mind it was indisputable proof that he had indeed been put out of the way for ever. Mr. Castlemaine must have possessed himself of the ring, unwilling that so valuable a jewel should be lost: perhaps had drawn it from Anthony's finger after death. She shuddered at the thought. But, in the midst of her distress, reason told her that this was only a negative sort of proof, after all; not sufficient to act upon, or to charge Mr. Castlemaine with the murder.

When somewhat recovered, she tenderly kissed the ring, and replaced it in the small compartment with the letter. Pushing in the slide, she shut the drawer, and closed and locked the bureau; thus leaving all things as she had found them. Very little result had been gained, it is true, but sufficient to spur her onwards on her future search. With her mind in a tumult, with every vein throbbing and fevered, she left the candle on the ground where she had now lodged it, and went to the window, gasping for air.

The night was bright with stars; opposite to her, and apparently at no distance at all, rose that dark building, the Friar's Keep. As she stood with her eyes strained upon it, though in reality not seeing it, but lost in thought, there suddenly shone a faint light at one of its casements. Her attention was awakened now; her heart began to throb.

The faint light grew brighter: and she distinctly saw a form in a monk's habit, the cowl drawn over its head, slowly pass the window; the light seeming to come from a lamp in its outstretched hand. All the superstitious tales she had heard of the place rushed into her mind: this must be the apparition of the Grey Friar. Charlotte Guise had an awful dread of apparitions, and she turned sick and faint.

With a cry, only half suppressed, she caught up the candle, and flew through the door into the narrow passage. The outer door was opening to her hand, when the voice of Harry Castlemaine was heard in the corridor, almost close to her.

Ah, far more sick and faint did she turn now! Discovery seemed inevitable. Instinct led her to blow out the light and to push the door to. Had the others come home? Was Mr. Castlemaine ascending to his study to catch her there? Trembling, terrified, the unhappy lady stood there, the ghost

of the Friar's Keep behind her, the dread of detection before her. Could the floor have opened, the unhappy lady would thankfully have disappeared within it.

The minute seemed like an hour. Harry did not come on. He appeared to have halted to listen to something. Miles was speaking below.

"Thought I had gone with them to the dinner, and so put out the lights!" retorted Harry, in his clear, good-natured tones. "You saw the carriage drive away, I suppose, without me. Well, light up again, and bring in some supper."

He came on now, and went into his chamber at the end of the corridor. Staying there a minute or two, as though changing his coat, he passed back, and downstairs again. Charlotte Guise, trembling in every limb, stole out as the echo of his footsteps died away, closed the door and took refuge in her own room. There she went into hysterics: hysterics that she was totally unable to suppress, and muffled her head in a blanket to deaden the cry.

The next morning there was commotion in the house: Miss Flora Castlemaine had found herself locked in her bedroom. Given to taking impromptu excursions in a morning en robe de nuit, after books, or the kitten, or into somebody's bedroom who was sure not to want her, the young lady for once found herself caged. Mrs. Castlemaine made an angry stir about it; locked doors were dangerous in case of fire, she said. She accused the maid, Eliza, who attended on Miss Flora, and threatened her with dismissal.

Poor Madame Guise, who was complaining of headache this morning, and whose eyes were red and heavy, took the blame upon herself, to exculpate the wrongfully accused servant. In her terror of the previous night, she had totally forgotten to unlock Flora's door. She hastened now to say that she had looked in on the sleeping child when she herself went to bed: in coming out, it was possible that she had turned the key. Many of the chamber-doors in France shut and opened with the key only; she might have turned the key in this instance, meaning only to shut the door.

So the matter ended. But Charlotte Guise could not help feeling how painfully one wrong act leads to another. And Mr. Harry, she found, had never been to the dinner at all.

Some matter of business, or perhaps some whim, had led him to break his engagement, and to give due notice of it the day beforehand to the entertainers. As Miles had observed, one never could be certain of Harry Castlemaine.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GREY MONK.

THAT the Grey Monk was haunting the Friar's Keep that night, and for a longer period than could be quite agreeable to any chance pedestrian, appeared to be undoubted.

Some of the Grey Sisters were up that evening at the coast-guard-station. The wife of one of the men was very ill, her infant being only three days old: and Sister Rachel had been with her for the day. At eight o'clock Sister Rachel was relieved by Sister Mona, who would remain the night. Sister Ann walked up from the Nunnery with Sister Mona for company, and would walk back again with Sister Rachel.

It was about half-past eight when Sisters Ann and Rachel left the station to return home. The night was starlight, the air somewhat frosty. Talking of the poor woman, just quitted, Sister Rachel saying the fever was increasing, they approached the Friar's Keep. They were on the opposite side of the road, and had nearly reached Chapel Lane, when something strange—some glimmer or faint flash—struck on Sister Rachel's vision, and caused her to turn her eyes on the upper casements of the Keep. With a cry of terror, she seized hold of Sister Ann and clung to her.

"What is the matter?" asked Sister Ann. But in turning to her companion, she also raised her eyes to the windows of the Keep, and saw the Grey Monk slowly gliding along, his cowl covering his head, and his lamp in his hand. A shadowy form, suggestive of terrible ideas of visitants from another world.

The blood of the two unfortunate Sisters seemed to turn cold. They clung to each other for a moment in an agony of terror, then tore onwards as fast as their trembling limbs would

carry them, to the Grey Nunnery. The door was opened by Sister Caroline, and they burst into the reception-parlour.

The Lady Superior sat there, Mary Ursula; and most of the sisters with her who were not out on charitable missions. To have silenced the two terrified grey women would have been about as easy as to stem the course of a rushing torrent. They had seen the apparition of the Grey Monk gliding past the window with their own eyes; had seen his lamp; had nearly fainted dead away.

"Tut, tut!" reproved Sister Mildred, who was better this evening and downstairs. "I think you must have been deceived by your fears. *I* never saw it in my life."

But they only told their tale the more persistently, and Sister Mildred wavered. In vain Mary Ursula represented that there were no such things as ghosts: that people in believing in them, were misled by their fears and fancies. To this the two alarmed women only reiterated that they *had seen* it. They were walking quietly along, talking of the poor sick wife of the coastguardsman; nothing could have been further from their thoughts than fears or fancies, when the figure suddenly appeared before their astonished eyes.

"Sister Rachel saw it first," urged Sister Ann, anxious to defend herself against the imputation of having taken alarm unnecessarily. She caught hold of my arm; and, in turning to her, I saw the pale light in the window, and the figure of the Grey Monk. We stood rooted to the spot, holding on to one another, too frightened to move. He glided past that window, and then past the other, his lighted lamp stretched out in his hand; just as Sister Lettice once saw him glide a year or so ago—and she knows it."

Sister Lettice, a simple woman, great in pudding-making, who had stood listening with round, frightened eyes, murmured her confirmation. One night, when she was belated, having been to a farm-house where sickness reigned, she had seen it exactly as the two sisters were describing it now; and had come home and fainted.

"I was beginning to forget my fright," said Sister Lettice, looking pleadingly at the two Superiors. "But since the talk there has lately been about poor Mr. Anthony Castlemaine, I've not dared to go out at night alone. For the ghost has been

seen more frequently since he disappeared. In fact, as the ladies know, it's said by some that it is the young man's spirit that comes now, not the Grey Friar's."

"It was the Grey Friar we saw to-night, let people say what they will," rejoined Sister Ann.

The argument continued. This was a great event in the monotonous existence of the Grey Ladies: and the two unfortunate Sisters were trembling still. Mary Ursula withdrew quietly from the room, and went up to her chamber with a clouded brow. There she put on the grey cloak and bonnet of the order, came down again, and let herself out at the front-door.

There was something in all this gossip that disturbed and distressed Mary Ursula. Anthony's fate and the uncertainty connected with it, was more often in her mind than she would have cared to tell. Like Charlotte Guise—what with dwelling on it and listening to the superstitious surmises in Greylands —she had grown to think that the Friar's Keep did contain some mystery not yet solved. As to "ghosts," Miss Castlemaine's sound sense utterly repudiated all belief in them. What, then, she naturally asked herself, was this figure, that took the appearance of the traditional Grey Monk, and showed itself at the windows of the Keep, lamp in hand? Had it anything to do with Anthony's disappearance?

Obeying an irresistible impulse, she was going forth to-night to look at this said apparition herself—if, indeed, it would appear again. It was perhaps a foolish thing to do; but she wanted to see with her own eyes what and whom it was like. With her whole heart she wished the occurrences of that past February night and the mysteries of the Friar's Keep—if it in truth contained any—were thrown open to the light of day: it might tend to lighten what was dark—to clear her uncle from the suspicions attaching to him. It was of course his place to institute this search, but he did not do it. Encasing himself in his pride, Mary supposed he was content to let the matter alone until it righted itself. But she loved her uncle and was painfully jealous for his good name.

Turning swiftly from the gate of the Nunnery, she went up the hill, passed the chapel ruins, crossed the road, and stood gazing at the Friar's Keep. The church clock was striking nine. Taking up her position under the hedge, in almost the

self-same spot that John Bent and Anthony Castlemaine had taken theirs that unlucky night, she fixed her eyes on the windows, and waited. The old building looked grey and grim enough. Sometimes the moon lighted it up; but there was no moon to-night. The stars were bright, the atmosphere was clear.

The minutes, as they went by, seemed hours. Mary Ursula had not much more patience than other people, and it was rapidly exhausting itself. Not a sign was there of the Grey Monk or of any other appearance. To judge by its lonely look, one might have said the Keep had never been entered since the Grey Monk was alive.

"It is hardly to be supposed it would show itself twice in one night," breathed Mary, in a somewhat mocking spirit. But in that she was mistaken: and she went away too soon.

At the end of a quarter-of-an-hour she gave it up. Crossing the road to the chapel-gate, she went in, traversed the ruins to the opposite corner to the Friar's Keep, and stood looking out to sea. Mary had another vexation on her mind that night; earlier in the day a report had reached her in a letter that her recreant lover, William Blake-Gordon, was engaged again. So soon!—so soon! She knew not whether it was true: it could not, either way, make much difference to the pain that filled her heart: but the report wrung it cruelly. The other name, mentioned in connection with his, was Agatha Mountsorrel's; her own close friend of former days. She knew that she ought not to feel this bitter pain, this wild jealousy; that, once he was lost to her, she should have put him away from her mind for ever. Ah, it is all very well for the wise to lay down laws; human nature is but frail, and the heart must be true to itself.

Some slight movement caught her attention below. It was low water, and the beach was free. Mary leaned over to look. But she could not see: the rocks hid the path as she stood. In the deep silence of the night, she thought she could distinguish voices: and she waited until their owners should have passed a little farther on, where a bend inward of the rocks allowed a view to be obtained.

It brought the greatest vexation of all! A tall fine form came into sight; too tall, too fine, for any one but Harry Castle-

maine. His arm encircled the waist of some young girl; his head was turned towards her, and they were conversing eagerly. She wore a dark cloak, its hood drawn over her head. Mary could not see her face, but she fancied it was Jane Hallet. They passed away under the Nunnery, as if returning to the village, and were lost to sight and hearing. Only at low water was that narrow strip accessible.

The sea was stretched before her eyes; the dead of the past ages were mouldering beneath her feet; the sky, studded with stars, lay above her head, in its vast expanse. But for all these signs, and the thoughts they involved, Mary Ursula might in that moment have lost heart and courage. The by-ways of life seemed very crooked just then; its troubles pregnant with perplexity and pain. But God was over all. The turbulent waves were held in check by His Hand; the dead had been called away by Him; the sky and the stars were only emblems of His power. Yes, He was over all. He looked down on the world; on its cares, its trials, its temptations and sins; overruling all according to His will. He was full of compassion, long-suffering and tender mercy. The present dark troubles here would pass away in a bright hereafter, and in a land where sorrow and suffering should flee away. A few years, and——

"Dear me, ma'am! I beg your pardon."

Mary Ursula, buried in thought, was startled at the address, and turned round with a slight cry. Close to her stood John Bent, a small basket in his hand, covered with a white cloth.

"I fear I frightened you, ma'am!"

"Just for the moment," she said, with her sweet smile, interrupting his further apologies. "I was looking at the sea; it is so grand from this spot!"

John Bent agreed that it was so, and proceeded to explain his presence. His wife had despatched him with some broth and other trifles to the sick woman up at the coastguard-station. In passing the chapel ruins on his way thither, he had caught sight of some one standing at the edge of the cliff, and turned in at once to see who it was.

"No wonder you did not hear me, ma'am, for I crept up on tiptoe," he acknowledged. "Since the disappearance of Mr. Anthony Castlemaine, this place is just as though it haunted me, for it is never out of my mind."

"The place haunts me also," said Mary Ursula. "I wish the doings of that night could be brought to light."

The landlord shook his head, she could not wish it as he wished it.

"I don't think now it ever will be," he said. "At least, I often fear it will not. There is only one person, I believe, who could throw light upon it; and it does not seem to be his pleasure to speak."

She knew that he alluded to her uncle; and she seized the moment for speaking a few words that she had long wished to say to John Bent. In spite of the opinion he held, and that she knew he held, in regard to that past night, she greatly respected the man, and remembered how much her father had respected him.

"I cannot be ignorant, Mr. Bent, of the suspicion you would cast on Mr. Castlemaine. I believe that nothing can be more unjust: more inconsistent with the facts of the case, if they could be disclosed. Why do you cherish this suspicion?"

John Bent was silent for a moment. He was a very honest-minded, straightforward man; and though he might occasionally find it inexpedient to avow the truth, he yet would not, even by implication, equivocate.

"It is a subject, ma'am, on which my mouth ought to be closed to you," he said at length.

"Not at all," she answered. "Were I Mr. Castlemaine's wife or daughter, you might urge that. I am his niece, it is true; but I have now in a manner withdrawn myself from the world, and—for my own sake, I wish you to speak openly with me."

John did not answer.

"Believe me when I say that I have no thought of reproaching you for entertaining these opinions," proceeded Miss Castlemaine. "I am sure that you hold them conscientiously; and——"

"I wish I didn't," interposed John. "I only wish I had no reason to do so."

"There is no reason," she said in low tones; "no true reason. I am as sure of it as that I stand here. Even had it been Mr. Castlemaine whom you saw that night, I feel sure his presence could have been explained away. But I think you

must have been mistaken. And you have received no confirmation of your opinion. Considering all this, I think you ought not to persist in that opinion, Mr. Bent; or to let the world believe that you persist in it."

"Madam, it's just this—not but what I feel the honour you do me, and thank you for it; but it's just this, ma'am: your opinion lies one way and mine the other: and while I would not insist to *you* that Mr. Castlemaine was guilty, I yet can't bring myself to say he was not."

"I am as fully persuaded he was not as that those stars are above us," she said.

"Mr. Anthony was made away with, madam——"

"No, no," she interrupted, with a shiver.

"I don't accuse Mr. Castlemaine of having done it," proceeded John. "What I say, and hold to, is this, ma'am: that Mr. Castlemaine must know something of what became of him. But he keeps silence: and it is that silence that strengthens suspicion against him. I saw him that night just as surely as I see you now, Miss Castlemaine. He passed into the Keep, and in less than a minute my attention was called from Mr. Castlemaine by Mr. Anthony's own movements. He also went into the Keep: and I never saw him again."

"I think you are cruelly obstinate. Forgive me, Mr. Bent; I do not wish to hurt your feelings," she added gently. "But it seems to me that you must have some ill-feeling against Mr. Castlemaine."

"The poor young gentleman was living under my roof, madam. I went forth with him that night, halted with him opposite this very gate, and watched him in. It has lain upon me ever since that I am in a manner accountable for him; and that I ought to do my utmost to find out what became of him."

"I can understand the feeling and appreciate it," she answered quickly; "but I think that its very intensity misleads you. The person you saw come in here may have been a stranger: you have had no confirmation of any kind that it was Mr. Castlemaine: and at night one's eyesight is deceptive."

"Yes I have," said John, dropping his voice to a whisper, and speaking with evident reluctance. "I have had confirmation. Madam, you make me speak against my will."

"You allude to Anthony," she rejoined somewhat impatiently.

"You have said, I know, that he also thought it was his uncle. But it may be that he was only led into the delusion by some exclamation of yours. And he is not here to prove it, one way or the other."

"We both saw him, ma'am, saw plainly that it was Mr. Castlemaine; but I did not allude to Mr. Anthony," spoke John. "It has been confirmed by another."

"By whom?" she asked, drawing her cloak together with a sharp movement as though she were cold. "Do not hesitate to tell me all."

"Well, ma'am—since you insist on my speaking—up to last night that ever was, I had no idea that Mr. Castlemaine had been seen by any but Mr. Anthony and me. But I find he was. You will perhaps think the evidence not worth much, Miss Castlemaine, for the man who saw him was more than half tipsy at the time: but he must have had his wits about him, for all that."

To make clear to the reader what the landlord related we must go back to the previous evening. That evening at twilight, John Bent sauntered over to the beach, and sat down on the bench to smoke his pipe. It was a fine evening, favourable for the fishing-boats. Whilst he was quietly smoking, and gazing at the stars, beginning to show themselves in the sky, Jack Tuff, the sailor, strolled up, and took his seat on the same bench. He produced his pipe, but evidently was without tobacco. John handed him some, and allowed him to light the pipe by his own. Talking of this and that, they somehow fell upon the subject of Anthony Castlemaine's disappearance: and Mr. Tuff, perhaps out of gratitude for the tobacco, avowed to his astonished companion that he could have confirmed his evidence, had he chosen, as to its having been Mr. Castlemaine who had crossed the road to the chapel ruins that fatal February night.

According to Mr. Jack Tuff's account, his own movements that night had been as follows. He had walked over to the little fishing hamlet, Beeton, and taken a glass with a comrade there. It might have been two glasses. At any rate, it was sufficient to make Jack wish to pay another social visit on his way to Greylands, instead of going straight home. In one of the three cottages at the back of Greyland's Rest, there lodged

a sailor friend of Jack's: and accordingly Jack turned up Chapel Lane to make the call. There he stayed until late, taking other glasses; and he turned out considerably after eleven o'clock with unsteady legs. He staggered down Chapel Lane pretty safely, and when opposite the turning to the Hutt, who should emerge from that turning but some tall man. At the moment, Jack Tuff happened to be steadying himself against a tree: but he made it out to be Mr. Castlemaine. He did not know whether Mr. Castlemaine saw him; but fancied he did not do so. Mr. Castlemaine went up the lane towards his home, and Jack Tuff went on down it.

So far, that might be regarded as corroboration of the Master of Greylands' statement that he had left the Hutt about half-past eleven after smoking a pipe with the Commodore: and it appeared probable that Mr. Castlemaine had not seen Jack Tuff, or he might have called on him to confirm his testimony as to the hour.

Jack Tuff was continuing his progress down the lane, when his hat rolled off. After several unsuccessful endeavours, he recaptured it, but something was undoubtedly the matter with either the head or the hat; for the hat would not go on to the head, or the head into the hat. A branch of a tree, or something, caught Jack's elbow, and the hat dropped again; Jack, in stooping, dropped also; and there he was, sitting amongst the trees at the side of the lane, his back propped against one of them and his hat nowhere.

How long Jack remained there he did not pretend to say. His impression was that he fell asleep; but whether that was so or not, Jack could not have told had he been bribed with gold. At any rate, the next thing he heard or remembered, was, that steps were coming down the lane. Jack looked up, and saw they were those of the Master of Greylands.

"Are you sure it was him?" interrupted John Bent, at this point of the narration, edging a little nearer to Jack on the bench.

"In course I'm sure," replied Jack Tuff. "The moon shone full upon him through the bare trees, and I saw him plain. He didn't see me that time, for sure. I was in the dark, right in the clump o' trees; and he went along with his head and eyes straight before him to the end o' the lane."

"And where did he go then?"

"Don't know. He didn't come back again. Suppose he was crossing over to the Keep."

"Well, go on," said John.

But there was not much more to tell. After this incident, Mr. Tuff bethought himself that he might as well be getting homewards. To make a start, however, was not an easy matter. First he had to find his hat, which took up some considerable time: it was only when he had given it up as lost that he became conscious of its being doubled up under him as he sat. Next he had to pull out his match-box and light his pipe: and that also took time. Lastly, he had to get upon his legs, a work requiring care and skill, but accomplished by the friendly aid of the trees. Altogether from a quarter to half-an-hour must have passed in the process. Once fairly started and clear of the lane, he came upon Mr. Bent, pacing about opposite the ruins and waiting for Mr. Anthony Castlemaine.

"Did you hear the pistol-shot?" asked John Bent when the recital was over.

"Never heard it at all," said Jack Tuff. "I must have been feeling for my hat."

"And why did you not say at the time that you saw the Master of Greylands—and so have borne out my story?" demanded John Bent, as a final question.

"I dare say!" retorted Jack Tuff: "and been laughed at for an imbecile who was drunk and saw double! Nobody would have believed me. I'm not a-going to say it now, Mr. Bent, except to you. I'm not a-going to draw down Mr. Castlemaine upon me, and perhaps get put away in jail."

And this was all John Bent got out of him. That the man spoke according to his belief—namely, that it was Mr. Castlemaine he had seen both times that night—John could have staked his life. But that the man was equally determined not to say as much to the world, and brave the displeasure of Mr. Castlemaine, the landlord was equally sure of.

Miss Castlemaine heard the narrative in silence. It did not shake her belief in the innocence of her uncle; but it made it more difficult to convince John Bent, and she was now sorry to have spoken to him at all. With a deep sigh she turned to depart.

"We can only wait the elucidation that time will bring," she said to the landlord. "Rely upon it, that if any ill deed was done that night, Mr. Castlemaine had no hand in it."

John Bent maintained a respectful silence. They crossed the ruins, and he held the gate for her to pass through. Just then she remembered another topic, and spoke of it.

"What is it that appears at the casements here, in the garb of a Grey Friar? Two of the Sisters have been alarmed by it to-night."

"Something like a dozen people have been scared by it lately," said John. "As to what it is, ma'am, *I* don't know. Senseless idiots, to be frightened! as if a ghost could harm us! I should like to see it appear to *me!*"

With this answer, betraying not only his superiority to the Greylands world in general, but his innate bravery, and a mutual good-night, they parted. John going up the hill with his basket; Miss Castlemaine turning towards the Nunnery, and pondering deeply.

Strange, perhaps, to say, considering the state Jack Tuff was avowedly in that eventful night, a conviction that his sight had not deceived him, had taken possession of her. That some mystery did attach to that night, apart from the disappearance of Anthony, she had always fancied: and this evidence only confirmed it. Many a time the thought had arisen, only to be driven back again, that her uncle was not as open in regard to that night's work as he ought to be. Had such an accusation or suspicion been brought against herself, she would boldly have confronted her accusers and asserted her innocence, taking Heaven as her witness, if needs were. He had not done this; he had never voluntarily spoken of it; in short, he shunned the subject—and it left an unsatisfactory impression upon her mind. What should Mr. Castlemaine want in the chapel ruins at that midnight hour?—what could he want? But if it was he who went in, why did he deny it? If it was really Mr. Castlemaine, why, the inference was that he must know what became of Anthony. It seemed very strange altogether; an unaccountable and mysterious affair. Mary felt it to be so. Not that she lost an iota of faith in her uncle; she seemed to trust him as she would have trusted her father; but her mind was troubled, her brain was in confusion.

In some such confusion as she actually stepped into a minute later. At the gate of the Nunnery she found a small excited crowd. Women were crying, girls were hurrying: a man with some object covered up in his arms, was in their midst. When the garb of Miss Castlemaine was recognized in the darkness, all fell back respectfully.

"What is the matter, good people!" asked Sister Mary Ursula. And a gesture of sympathy escaped her as she heard the answer. Polly Gleeson, one of Tim Gleeson's numerous little ones, had set her night-gown on fire and was terribly burnt. Tim was somewhere abroad, as usual: but another man had offered to bring the child to the Grey Ladies—the usual refuge for sickness and accidents.

Admitted to the Nunnery, the little sufferer was carried up to one of the small beds always kept in readiness. Sister Mildred herself, who was great in burns, came to her at once, directing two of the Sisters what was to be done. The sobbing mother, who was a great simpleton, but had a hard life of it on the whole, asked whether she might not stay and watch by Polly for the night: but the Ladies recommended her to go home to her other children and leave Polly to them in all confidence. Sister Mildred pronounced the burns, though bad and very painful, to be unattended with danger: should the latter arise, she promised Nancy Gleeson to send for her at once. So Nancy went away pacified, the crowd attending her; and the good Ladies were left to their charge and to the night-watch it entailed.

But Sister Mary Ursula had recognized the face of Jane Hallet amongst the women and girls pressing round the gate. She recognized the dress also, as the one she had seen before that night.

Meanwhile John Bent reached the coastguard-station. After chatting with the sick woman's husband, Henry Mann, who happened to be off duty and at home, John departed again with his empty basket. He chanced to be on the side opposite the Friar's Keep; for that path led direct from the preventive station—just as the two Sisters, Ann and Rachel, had taken it rather more than an hour earlier. John Bent, unconscious of what had happened to them, walked leisurely, his mind full of the interview lately held with Miss Castlemaine. In passing

the Friar's Keep he cast his eyes upwards. Few people passed it at night without that upward gaze—for superstition has an irresistible fascination for most of us. Even as John looked, a faint light dawned on the casement from within: and there came into view the figure, bearing its lamp. It was probably just at that self-same moment that the eyes of Madame Guise, gazing stealthily from the window of Mr. Castlemaine's study, were regaled with the same sight. John Bent did not like it any more than madame did; any more than the Sisters liked it. He took to his heels, and arrived at the Dolphin in a state of chill not to be described.

CHAPTER XIX.

JANE HALLET.

GREYLANDS lay, calm and monotonous, basking in the morning sun. There were no signs of the commotion that had stirred it the previous night: no crowding people surrounding a sad little burden; and John Bent's propriety had returned to him. Greylands had heard the news from one end to the other—the Grey Monk had been seen again. It had appeared to two of the Sisters and to the landlord of the Dolphin.

The burnt child, an intelligent girl of five years old, lay in the little bed, Sister Phœby sitting by her. The window faced the road, and was protected by upright iron bars: originally placed there, perhaps, to prevent the nuns from taking a sly peep at the world. Polly Gleeson was in less pain, and lay quietly. Mr. Parker had looked in, and confirmed Sister Mildred's opinion that she would do well.

The door opened gently, and Sister Mary Ursula and Miss Reene entered. Ethel, hearing of the accident, had come down from Greylands' Rest. Sister Phœby rose, smiling and nodding, and they approached the bed.

"She is ever so much better," said the Sister. "See, she does not cry at all."

Polly was a pretty little girl. Her brown hair lay around her on the bolster; her dark eyes smiled at the ladies. The face was not touched, and nothing could be seen of the injuries

as she lay: the worst were about the chest and shoulders. Tears stood in Ethel's eyes.

"How did it happen, Polly?" she said, stooping gently to kiss her.

"Billy took the candle to look for a marble on the floor, and I looked too; and then there come a great light and mother screeched out."

"But were you not in bed before that time, Polly? It was past nine o'clock."

"Mother was undressing us: she'd been busy a-washing."

"Poor little darling! Well, Polly, you will be well soon; and you must take great care of candles after this."

Polly nodded as emphatically as the bolster allowed her; as much as to say she would never go within range of a candle again. Miss Castlemaine took Sister Phœby's place, and the latter went away.

That the child was now at ease, seemed evident; for presently her eyelids, heavy with sleep, gradually closed. She had had no sleep all night. Mary Ursula took some work from her pocket. The Sisters were making garments for this child: all she possessed had been caught up from the floor by the terrified mother, and rolled round her to put the fire out.

"How peaceful it seems here," said Ethel, in low tones. "I think I should like to come and be a Sister with you, Mary."

Miss Castlemaine smiled one of her sad smiles. "That would never do, Ethel."

"It is so useful a life."

"You will find usefulness in another sphere. It would not be right to bury yourself here."

"We all told you that, Mary, you know, at Greylands' Rest. But you have come."

"My dear, the cases are very different. My hopes of happiness, my prospects in the world were over: yours, Ethel, are not even yet beginning. When some good man woos and wins you, you will find your proper sphere of usefulness."

"I don't want to be won," said Ethel: as young girls are given to saying. "I'm sure I would rather be a Grey Sister ten times over than marry Harry Castlemaine."

Mary looked up quickly. The words brought to her mind one of the incidents of the past night.

"Harry does not continue to tease you, does he, Ethel?"

"Yes he does. I thought he had left it off: but this morning he brought the subject up again, before every one!"

"What did he say?"

"Not very much. He was going out of the room after breakfast. He turned to me and said he hoped I should soon be ready to answer the question he had put to me more than once. Papa and mamma must have understood what he meant. It was very wrong of him."

"I think he can only be joking, Ethel," was the slow, thoughtful rejoinder.

"I don't know whether he is or not. Sometimes I think so; at others I think he is in earnest: whichever it may be, I dislike it very much. Not for the whole world would I marry Harry Castlemaine."

"Ethel, I fancy—I am not sure, but I fancy—you have no real reason to fear that he will press it, or to let it trouble you. Harry is hardly yet staid enough to settle down. He does many random things."

"We had quite a commotion at home this morning," resumed Ethel, passing to another topic. "Some one locked Flora into her bedroom last night—when she wanted to run out this morning as usual, the door was fastened. Mamma has been very angry: and when the news of Polly Gleeson's accident came up just now, she began again, saying Flora might just as well have been burnt also."

"Who locked her in?"

"I don't know—unless it was Madame Guise. Papa and mamma and I were dining at Stilborough—at the Barclays'. Harry would not go."

"But about the door?"

"Well, Madame Guise thought she might unintentionally have done it. She said she went in last night to look at Flora. *I* can scarcely think she did it, for she had gone in many a time and never turned the key before. Or the keys of other doors, either."

"At least, it does not seem to have been of any consequence."

"No; only mamma made it so. I tell you every little trifle that I can, Mary," she added, laughing quietly. "Shut up

here, it seems to me that you must like to hear news from the outer world."

"And so I do," was the answer. "I have not lost all interest in my fellow-pilgrims, I assure you, Ethel."

"I wore my black net trimmed with white satin ribbons: you can't think how nice it looked," said Miss Ethel, some of her vanity creeping to the fore. "And a silver flower in my hair."

"I have no doubt the dress and the flower looked very well, considering the pretty girl they adorned," was Mary's reply. And Ethel blushed slightly. She knew how pretty she was.

"Does Madame Guise continue to suit?"

"Oh, quite well. Mrs. Castlemaine thinks no one can equal her. I like her also; but at times she puzzles me."

"How does she puzzle you?"

"Well, I can hardly explain it. She seems strange at times. But I must be going," added Ethel, rising.

"You are in a hurry, Ethel."

"I have to go up the cliff to Miss Hallet's. Jane is hemstitching some handkerchiefs for mamma. Mamma had one of them with her last night: Mrs. Barclay saw the work, and said she would like some done for herself. So I am to tell Jane to call at Mrs. Barclay's the next time she goes to Stilborough. The work is really beautiful."

A few more words, and Ethel took her departure. Opposite the beach she encountered Mrs. Bent: who was returning home in her cherry-ribboned cap from a purchase at Pike's general shop.

"A nice day again, Miss Ethel!"

"It is a lovely day," said Ethel, stopping; for she and Mrs. Bent were great friends. "I have been in to see poor Polly Gleeson. How badly she is burnt!"

"The only wonder is it never happened before, with that imbecile of a mother," was Mrs. Bent's tart rejoinder. "Of all incapable women, Nancy Gleeson's about the worst. Fancy her letting the children play with a candle in their night-gowns! Where could her senses have been?"

"Well, it is a sad thing for Polly. But the Sisters say she will do well. Oh, by the way, Mrs. Bent," continued Ethel, turning as she was going onwards, "will you let mamma have

your receipt for stewed eels again? The new cook does not do them to her fancy: and mamma cannot tell where the fault lies."

"It's the best receipt in the three kingdoms," spoke Mrs. Bent, with pride. "It was my mother's before me. Will you step across for it now, Miss Ethel?"

"Not now: as I come back. I am going up the cliff."

"To Nancy Gleeson's, I suppose," cried Mrs. Bent, in her free way. "She does not deserve it. If I had twenty children about me, I'll be bound not one of 'em would ever set itself alight in my presence."

"Not there," said Ethel, slightly laughing at Mrs. Bent's tartness. "I am taking a message from mamma to Jane Hallet."

"I hope it is to warn her not to make herself so free with Mr. Harry," cried Mrs. Bent, speaking impulsively. Had she thought for a moment, she would not have said it.

"Warn her not to make free with Mr. Harry!" repeated Ethel, somewhat haughtily. "Why, Mrs. Bent, what can you mean?"

"Well, I have seen them walking together after nightfall," said Mrs. Bent, unable to recall her words.

"They may have met accidentally," returned Ethel, after a pause.

"Oh, of course, they *may*," assented Mrs. Bent, in significant tones.

"Since when have you seen them?" pursued Ethel, feeling surprised and rather scandalized.

"Ah, well, I can't tell that. Since last autumn, though. No harm may be meant, Miss Ethel; I don't say it is; and none may come of it: but young girls in Jane Hallet's position ought to take better care of themselves than to give rise to talk."

Ethel continued her way in some annoyance. Whilst Mr. Harry Castlemaine made a pretence of addressing herself, it was not agreeable to hear that he was flirting with the village girls. It is true that Ethel did not intend to listen to his suit: she absolutely rejected it; but that made little difference. Neither was this walking with Jane Hallet the right thing in itself. What if he made Jane fond of him? As to any

"harm" arising, as Mrs. Bent had just phrased it, Ethel did not fear that—did not, in fact, give it a thought. Jane Hallet was very superior to the general run of girls at Greylands. She had been well educated by the Grey Ladies, morally and otherwise, having gone to school to them daily for years; she was modest and retiring in manner; and Ethel would as soon believe a breath of scandal against herself as against Jane. Her brother, George Hallet, who was drowned, had been made a sort of companion of by Harry Castlemaine during the last year or two of his life, as Greylands well remembered: and Ethel came to the conclusion that the intimacy Mrs. Bent talked of must be a sort of remainder of that friendship, meaning nothing: and so she dismissed it from her mind. Mrs. Bent, as Ethel knew, was rather given to finding fault with her neighbours.

Now it happened that as Ethel was ascending the cliff, Jane Hallet, within the cottage near the summit, was being taken to task by her aunt for the very fault that Mrs. Bent had alluded to—staying abroad after nightfall. Miss Hallet had lately found much occasion to speak on this score; but Jane was invariably ready with some plausible excuse; so that Miss Hallet, naturally unsuspicious, and trusting Jane as she would have trusted herself, never made much by the argument.

After taking the cambric handkerchief to Greylands' Rest the previous evening, Jane had gone home, taken her tea hastily, put off the best things that her aunt scolded her for wearing, and then sat down to work. Some article was wanted in the house; and at dusk Jane ran down to Pike's shop in her dark cloak to get it. From which expedition she did not return until after half-past nine: and she seemed to have come up running for a wager. Miss Hallet was then ill with an attack of spasms, and Jane remained unreproved. This morning, when the housework was done, and they had begun their sewing, Miss Hallet had leisure to recur to it. Jane sat by the window, busy at one of the handkerchiefs? The sun shone on her bright flaxen hair; the light print dress she wore was neat and nice—as Jane's dresses always were.

"How long does it take to get from here to Pike's shop and back again, Jane?"

"From here to Pike's shop and back again, aunt? I could

do it easily in ten minutes," said unsuspecting Jane, fancying her aunt might be wanting to send her there. "It would take you longer, of course."

"How did it happen then last night that it took you two hours and ten minutes?" demanded Miss Hallet. "You left here soon after half-past seven, and you did not get back till close upon ten."

The soft colour in Jane's face grew suddenly bright. She held her work to the window, as though some difficulty had occurred in the cambric.

"After buying the sugar, I went into the parlour to say good-evening to Susan Pike, aunt. And then there came that dreadful outcry about Nancy Gleeson's poor burnt child."

The truth, but not the whole truth. Miss Jane had stayed three minutes with Susan Pike; and the commotion about the child had occurred some two hours later. The intervening time she did not allude to, or account for. Miss Hallet, never thinking to inquire minutely into time, so far accepted the explanation.

"If Nancy Gleeson's children had all been burnt, that's no reason why you should stay out all that while."

"Nearly every one was out, aunt. It was quite like a fair round the Nunnery gate."

"You go off here; you go there; pretty nearly every evening you dance out somewhere. I'm sure *I* never did so when I was a girl."

"When it is too dusk to see to work and too soon to light the candle, a run down the cliff does no harm," returned Jane.

"Yes, but you stay there when once you are down. It comes of that propensity of yours for gossip, Jane. Once you get into the company of Susan Pike or that idle Patty Nettleby, you think as much about time as you might if all the clocks stood still for you."

Jane bent to bite off a needleful of cotton—by which her flushed face was hidden.

"There you are! How often have I told you not to bite your thread! Many a set of teeth as good as yours has been ruined by it. I had the habit once; but my lady broke me of it. Use your scissors, and—— Dear me! here's Miss Reene."

Ethel came in. Jane stood up to receive her and to hear her

message. The girl's face was shy and her manner retiring. Ethel thought of what she had just heard; certainly Jane looked pretty enough to attract Mr. Harry Castlemaine. But the blue eyes raised to hers were honest and good; and Ethel believed Jane was good also.

"Thank you: yes, I shall be glad to do the handkerchiefs for Mrs. Barclay," said Jane. "But I shall not be going into Stilborough for a week or so: I was there yesterday. And of course I should not begin them until I have finished Mrs. Castlemaine's."

"Very well; I suppose Mrs. Barclay is in no particular hurry," said Ethel.

"Jane might get through more work if she chose," remarked Miss Hallet. "Not that I wish her to do any: it is her own will entirely. On the other hand, I have no objection to it: and as she is fond of finer clothes than I should purchase for her, she has to get them for herself. Just before you came in, Miss Reene, I was telling her how she fritters away her time. Once dusk has set in, down she goes to her acquaintances in the village, and there she stays with one and another, never heeding anything else. It is a great waste of time."

Of all faces, Jane's at that moment was the hottest. She was standing before Miss Reene, going on with her work as she stood. Ethel wondered why she coloured so.

"To night she stays at Susan Pike's; to-morrow night it's Martha Nettleby's; the next night it's old Mother Dance's, under the cliff!" went on Miss Hallet. "Chattering with one gossip and another, and dancing after burnt children and what not, Jane never lacks an excuse for idling away her evenings."

"Mrs. Castlemaine said something about having her initials worked on these handkerchiefs: do you know whether she wishes it done, Miss Reene?" interposed Jane, who seemed flurried by the lecture. "I did not like to ask about it yesterday afternoon."

"I don't know at all," said Ethel. "You had better see Mrs. Castlemaine."

Ethel went down the cliff again, tripping along the zigzag path. Other paths branched off to other cottages. She took one that brought her to the door of Tim Gleeson's hut: a poor

place of two rooms, with a low roof. Tim, an idle, improvident, and in general good-tempered man, sat on a stone at the door, his blue cloth legs stretched out, his rough face gloomy.

"You are not in the boat to-day, Tim," remarked Ethel.

"Not to-day, Miss Castlemaine," said the man, slowly rising. "I'm a-going out with the next tide. This accident have took the strength out of me! When a lot of 'em come into the Dolphin last night, a-saying our Polly was afire, you might ha' knocked me down with a feather. Mrs. Bent she went on at me like anything, she did—as if it was my fault! Telling me she'd like to shut the inn doors again' me, for I went there when I ought to be elsewhere, and that I warn't good for my salt. I'd rather it had been any of 'em than Polly: she's such a nice little thing, she is."

"Is your wife indoors?"

"No; she's off to the Nunnery. I've vowed to her that if she ever gets another candle-end in the house, I'll make her eat it," concluded Tim, savagely.

"But she must have a candle to see with."

"I don't care: I won't have the young 'uns burnt. Thanks to you, miss, for turning out o' your way to think on us. The brats be squalling indoors. I've just give 'em a licking all round."

Ethel ran on, and gained the Dolphin, entering by the more familiar door that stood open opposite the beach. Mr. and Mrs. Bent were both in the room: he, by the fire, reading his favourite weekly newspaper, the *Stilborough Herald:* she, sitting at the table under the window, stoning a plate of raisins. The receipt Ethel had asked for lay ready.

"You'll please tell Mrs. Castlemaine, Miss Ethel, that more or less pounded mace can be put according to taste," observed the landlady, as she handed Ethel the paper. "There's no particular quantity specified. It's strong: and a little of it goes a great way."

Ethel sat down near the table. John, who had risen to greet her, resumed his seat again. The screen introduced into the room during the late wintry weather had been taken away again. Mrs. Bent had a great mind to break it up and burn it; but for that screen Ethel Reene would not have overheard those dangerous words. But no allusion had since been made

to the affair, by any one of them: all three seemed contented to ignore it.

"You must excuse my going on with my work, Miss Ethel," said Mrs. Bent. "We've a dinner on to-night, and I had no notice of it till a few minutes ago. Some grand inspector-general of the coastguard-stations is here to-day; and he and two or three more gentlemen are going to dine here this evening. Mr. Castlemaine, I fancy, is to be one of them."

"Mr. Castlemaine!" cried Ethel.

"Either him or Mr. Harry. I believe it's him. And me with not a raisin in the house stoned for plum-pudding! I must make haste, if I am to get it boiled. It's not often I'm taken unawares like this."

"If you will give me an apron, I'll help you to stone them," said Ethel, taking off her black gloves.

"Now, Miss Ethel! As if I'd let you do anything of the kind! But that's just like you—always ready to do anybody a good turn."

"Give me the apron, please."

"I couldn't. If any of them from Greylands' Rest happened to look in, they'd be fit to snap at me; and at you, too, Miss Ethel. Stoning plums, indeed! There's no need, either: I am three parts through them."

Ethel began to do a few without the apron, in a desultory sort of way. John Bent came to some paragraph in the newspaper that excited his ire.

"Hear this, Miss Ethel!" he cried in anger. "What a shame!"

"'We have been given to understand that the rumour so freely circulated during this past week, of a matrimonial engagement having been entered into between Mr. Blake-Gordon and the heiress of Mountsorrel, has no foundation in fact.'"

"The villain!" cried Mrs. Bent, momentarily forgetting her work. "He can hardly be bad enough to think of another yet."

Ethel's work was arrested too. That any man could be so fickle-hearted as this, she had never believed.

"I knew the tale was going about," said the landlord. "I heard it talked of in Stilborough last market-day, Miss Ethel.

Any way, true or untrue, they say he is a good deal over at the Mountsorrels, and——"

John Bent brought his words to a standstill; rose, and laid down his newspaper. There had entered a rather peculiar-looking elderly gentleman, tall and upright yet, with a stout walking-stick in his hand. He wore a long blue coat with wide skirts and brass buttons, drab breeches and top-boots. His hair was long and snow-white, his dark eyes were fiery.

Taking off his broad-brimmed hat with old-fashioned courtesy, he looked round the room, particularly at Mrs. Bent and Ethel.

"This *is* the Dolphin, I think!" he cried dubiously.

"At your service, sir," said John.

"Ay, I thought so. But the door seems altered. It's a good many years since I was here. Oh—I see. Front-door on the other side. And you are its landlord—John Bent."

"Well, sir, I used to be."

"Just so. We shall do. I have walked over from Stilborough to see you. I want to know the truth of this dreadful report—that has only now reached my ears."

"Report, sir?" returned John—and it was perhaps natural that he should have his head filled at the moment with Mr. Blake-Gordon and the report touching that gentleman. "I don't know anything about it."

"Not know anything about it! But I am told that you know all about it. Come!"

Ethel was drawing on her gloves to depart. To help to stone raisins in private was one thing; to help when visitors came in was altogether different. John Bent looked back at the stranger.

"Perhaps we are at cross-purposes, sir. If you will tell me what you mean, I may be able to answer you."

"Him that I would ask about is the son of the friend of my early days, Basil the Careless. Young Anthony Castlemaine."

The change of ideas from Mr. Blake-Gordon to the unfortunate Anthony was sudden: John Bent gave a groan, and coughed it down. The gentleman resumed, after turning to look at Ethel as she went out.

"Is it true that he, Basil Castlemaine's son, came over the seas to this place a month or two ago?—and took up his abode

at this inn?—and put in a claim to his grandfather's estate, Greylands' Rest? Is that true?"

"Yes, sir."

"And where is he, this young Anthony?"

"I don't know, sir. I wish I did know."

"Is it true that he disappeared in some singular way one night—and that he has never since been seen or heard of?"

"That's true, sir—more's the pity."

The questioner took a step nearer John Bent, and dropped his voice to a more solemn key.

"*I am told that foul play has been at work.*"

"Foul play?" stammered John, not knowing whether this strange old man might be friend or foe—whether he might have come to call him to account for his random words. The stranger paused to notice his changing face, and then resumed.

"That the young man has been put out of the way by his uncle—James Castlemaine."

CHAPTER XX.

AN INTRUDER.

THE usual dinner hour at Greylands' Rest was half-past one o'clock. Mr. Castlemaine would have preferred a late dinner —but circumstances are sometimes stronger than we are. However, he never failed to put it off until evening upon the very slightest excuse.

Some years before the close of old Anthony Castlemaine's life, his health gave way. It was not so much a serious illness as a long and general failing. His medical attendant insisted upon his dining early; and the dinner hour was altered from six o'clock to half-past one. He recovered, and lived on for some years: but the early dinner hour was adhered to. James had never liked this early dining: and after his father's death he wished to return to the later hour. His wife, however, opposed it. *She* preferred the early dinner and the more social supper; and she insisted to Mr. Castlemaine that in the interests of Ethel and Flora they must continue to dine early. Mr. Castlemaine said he did not see that: Ethel was old enough to

dine late, and Flora might take her dinner at lunch-time. Yes, poor child, and have cold meat three days out of the seven, urged Mrs. Castlemaine. The Master of Greylands yielded the point as a general rule: but on any special occasion his edict was issued for the later hour.

Dinner was just over to-day, and the servants had withdrawn, leaving wine and dessert on the table. Mr. Castlemaine's sitting down had been partly a matter of courtesy: for he was going to dine in the evening at the Dolphin. The afternoon sun streamed into the dining-room. Mr. and Mrs. Castlemaine, Ethel, Flora, and Madame Guise, sat at the table. Harry Castlemaine had retired, and his chair was vacant. As a rule, Madame Guise never sat a moment longer at any meal than she could help: as soon as she could get up without an absolute breach of good manners, she did so. Mrs. Castlemaine called it a peculiarity. She estimated Madame Guise highly as an instructress, but she admitted to her more intimate friends that she did not understand her. To-day, as it chanced (do these things ever occur by chance?) she had stayed: and she sat in her place at Mr. Castlemaine's left hand in her perfectly-fitting black dress, with its white cuffs and collar, her wealth of auburn hair shading her pale, quiet face. Mr. Castlemaine was in a sociable mood: latterly he had often been too silent and abstracted. Mrs. Castlemaine had introduced the subject that was very much in her thoughts just now—a visit to Paris. The Master of Greylands was purposing to make a trip there this spring; and his wife, to her great delight, had obtained permission to accompany him. She had never been across the water in her life: the days of universal travelling had not then set in: and there were moments when she felt jealous of Ethel. Ethel had finished her education in the French capital; and was, so far, much wiser than herself.

Madame Guise was about to rise from the table when Miles came into the room and addressed his master.

"You are wanted, sir, if you please."

"Who is it?" asked Mr. Castlemaine.

"I don't know, sir. An oldish gentleman; a stranger. He asked——"

The servant's explanation was cut short by the appearance of the visitor himself; who had followed, without permission, from

the room to which he had been shown: a tall, erect, elderly man, attired in an ample blue coat and top-boots. His white hair was long, his dark eyes were keen. The latter seemed to take in the room and its inmates; his glance passing rapidly from each to each, as he stood holding his broad-brimmed hat and his stout walking-stick. Ethel knew him instantly for the stranger who had entered the Dolphin Inn while she was helping Mrs. Bent with the raisins an hour or so ago: and the probability was that he recognized her, for his eyes rested on her for a few seconds.

Mr. Castlemaine had risen. He went a step or two forward as if about to speak, but seemed to be uncertain. The stranger abruptly forestalled him.

"Do you know me, James Castlemaine?"

"Why—yes—is it not Squire Dobie?" replied Mr. Castlemaine, holding out his hand.

"Just so," replied the stranger, keeping his hands down. "Perhaps you won't care to take my hand when you know that I have come here as a foe."

"As a foe?" repeated Mr. Castlemaine.

"At present. Until I receive an answer to the question I have come to put to you. What have you done with Basil's son?"

A change passed over the face of Mr. Castlemaine: it was evident to any one who might be looking at him; a dark look, succeeded by a flush. Squire Dobie broke the momentary silence.

"My old friend Basil's son; Basil the Careless: young Anthony Castlemaine."

The Master of Greylands was himself again. "I do not understand you," he said, with marked distinctness. "I have done nothing with the young man."

"Then rumour belies you, James Castlemaine."

"I assure you, Squire Dobie, that I know no more where young Anthony Castlemaine went to, or where he is now than you know. It has been a mystery to myself, as to every one else at Greylands."

"I returned home to Dobie Hall last week," continued the stranger; "mean to stay there now; have only made flying visits to it since it became mine through poor Tom's death.

Drove into Stilborough yesterday for the first time; put up at the Turk's Head. Landlord, old Will Heyton, waited on me himself this morning at breakfast, talking of the changes and what not, that years have brought, since I and poor Tom, and Basil the Careless, and other rollicking blades used to worry the inn in the years gone by. We got to speak of Basil; 'twas only natural; and he told me that Basil had died abroad about last Christmas time; and that his son, named Anthony, had come over soon after to put in his claim to his patrimony, Greylands' Rest. He said that Anthony had suddenly disappeared one night; and was thought to have been *made away with.*"

During this short explanation, they had not moved. The speaker stood just within the door, which Miles had closed, Mr. Castlemaine facing him. Madame Guise, waiting for Flora, had turned to the stranger, her face changing to the pallor of the grave. The Master of Greylands caught sight of the pallor, and it angered him: angered him that any one should dare to broach this unsatisfactory topic in the presence of the ladies of his family, startling and puzzling them. But he controlled his voice and manner to a sort of courteous indifference.

"If you will take a seat—and a glass of wine with me, Squire Dobie, I will give you all the information I possess on the subject of young Anthony's disappearance. It is not much; it does not really amount to anything: but such as it is, you shall hear it. My wife, Mrs. Castlemaine. Sophia," turning to her as he made the introduction, "you had finished, I know: be so good as to leave us."

They filed out of the room: Flora first, with Madame Guise; Ethel and her step-mother following. The latter, who knew something of the Dobie family, at least by reputation, halted to exchange a few words with its representative as she passed him. By her manner, it seemed that she had put no offensive construction on his address to her husband: and the probability was that she did not do so. Mrs. Castlemaine might have been less aware than any one of the disagreeable rumours whispered in Greylands, connecting her husband with the doings of that ill-fated night: for who would be likely to speak of them to her?

Squire Dobie, remarking that he did not like his back to the fire, passed round the table and took the chair vacated by

Ethel. He was the second son of the old Squire Dobie, of Dobie Hall, a fine old place and property almost on the confines of the county. In the years gone by, as he had phrased it, he and his elder brother, Tom the heir, had been very intimate with Basil Castlemaine. Separation soon came. Basil went off on his impromptu travels abroad—from which, as the reader knows, he never returned; Tom Dobie, the heir, remained with his father at the Hall, never marrying: Alfred, this younger son, married a Yorkshire heiress, and took up his abode on her broad acres. It has been mentioned that Tom Dobie kept up a private occasional correspondence with Basil Castlemaine, and knew where he settled, but that has nothing to do with the present moment. Some two years ago Tom died. His father, the old Squire, survived him by a twelvemonth: and at his death the Hall fell to Alfred, who became Squire in his turn: he who had now intruded on Mr. Castlemaine.

"No, thank you; no wine," he said, as Mr. Castlemaine was passing the decanter to him. "I never take anything between my meals; and I've ordered my dinner for six o'clock at the Turk's Head. I await your explanation, James Castlemaine. What did you do with young Anthony?"

"May I ask whether Will Heyton told you I had done anything with him?" returned Mr. Castlemaine, as sarcastically as the extreme limit of civility permitted.

"No. Will Heyton simply said the young man had disappeared; he had been seen to enter that queer place, the Friar's Keep, at midnight, with, or closely following, the Master of Greylands. When I inquired whether the Master of Greylands was supposed to have been concerned in his disappearance, old Will simply shrugged his shoulders, and looked as innocent as a baby. The story affected me, James Castlemaine; I went out from the breakfast-table, calling upon the people I had formerly known in the town. I got talking of it with all, and heard the same tale over and over again. None accused you, mind; but I gathered what their *thoughts* were: that you must have had a hand in the disappearance of Anthony; or, at least, a knowledge of what became of him."

Mr. Castlemaine had listened in silence; perfectly unmoved. Squire Dobie regarded him keenly with his dark searching eyes.

"I know but little of the matter; less, apparently, than you know," he quietly said. "I am ready to tell you what that little is—but it will not help you, Squire Dobie."

"What do you mean in saying less than I know?"

"Because I never was near the Friar's Keep at all that night. Your informants, I presume, must have been, by their assuming to know so much."

"They know nothing. It is all conjecture."

"Oh, all conjecture," returned Mr. Castlemaine, with the air of one suddenly enlightened. "And you come here and accuse me on conjecture? I ought to feel supremely indebted to you, Squire Dobie."

"What they do say—and that is not conjecture—is, that it was you who preceded Basil's son into the Keep."

"Who says it?"

"Basil's son said it, and thought it: it was only that that took him in, poor fellow. The landlord of the inn here, John Bent, saw it and says it."

"But John Bent was mistaken. And you have only his word, remember, for asserting what Basil's son saw or said."

Squire Dobie paused, looking full at his host, as if he would gather whether he was deceiving him or not.

"Was it, or was it not you, who went into the Keep, James Castlemaine?"

"It was not. I have said from the first, I repeat it to you now, that I was not near the Keep that night: unless you call Teague's Hutt near it. As a matter of fact, the Hutt is near it; but——"

"I know how near it is," interrupted Squire Dobie. "I came round that way just now, up the lane; and took sounding of the places."

"Good. I went down to Teague's that night—you have no doubt heard all about the why and the wherefore. I smoked a pipe with Teague while making arrangements for a sail with him on the morrow; and I came straight back from the Hutt here, getting home at half-past eleven. I hear that Teague says he watched me up the lane: which I am sure I was not conscious of."

"You were at home here by half-past eleven?" spoke Squire Dobie.

"It had not gone the half-hour."

"And did not go down the lane again?"

"Certainly not. I had nothing to go for. On the following morning, before it was light, I was roused from my bed by tidings of the death of my brother Peter, and I went off at once to Stilborough."

"Poor Peter!" exclaimed the Squire. "What a nice steady young fellow he was!—just the opposite of Basil. And what a name he afterwards made for himself!"

"When I returned to Greylands in the afternoon," quietly went on Mr. Castlemaine, "and found that Anthony was said to have disappeared, and that my name was being bandied about in connection with it, you may imagine my astonishment."

"Yes, if you were really ignorant of the matter."

The Master of Greylands half rose from his chair, and then resumed it. His spirit, subdued hitherto, was quickening.

"Forbearance has its limits, Squire Dobie; so has courtesy. Will you inform me by what right you come into my house and persist in these most offensive questions?"

"By the right of my former friendship for your brother Basil. I have no children of my own: never had any; and when I heard this tale, my heart warmed to poor Basil's son: I resolved to take up his cause, and try to discover what had become of him."

"Pardon me, that does not give you the right to intrude here with these outspoken suspicions."

"I think it does. The suspicions are abroad, James Castlemaine, ignore them as you may. Your name is cautiously used: people must be cautious, you know: not used at all perhaps in any way that could be taken up. One old fellow, indeed, whispered a pretty broad word; but caught it up again when half said."

"Who was he?" asked the Master of Greylands.

"I'll be shot if I tell you. John Bent? No, that it was not: John Bent seems as prudent as the rest of them. See here, James Castlemaine: if an impression exists against you, you must not blame people, but circumstances. Look at these dispassionately, and see if they do not afford grounds for suspicion."

"If all the circumstances were true—yes. The most essential

link in them is without foundation—that it was I who went into the Friar's Keep. Let me put a question to you—what object could I possibly have in quitting my house at midnight to visit that ghostly place?"

"I don't know. It puzzles every one."

"If John Bent is really correct in his assertions, that some one crossed from the lane to the Friar's Keep, I can only assume it to have been a stranger. No inhabitant of Greylands would voluntarily enter that place at midnight. It has a bad reputation: all sorts of ghostly fancies attach to it. I should about as soon think of quitting my house at night to visit the moon as the Friar's Keep."

Squire Dobie sat in thought. All this was more than plausible; difficult to discredit. He began to wonder whether he had not been hard upon James Castlemaine.

"What is your opinion of the disappearance?" he asked. "You must have formed one."

Mr. Castlemaine lifted his dark eyebrows.

"I cannot form one," he said. "Sometimes I have thought Anthony must have attempted to run down the rocks from the chapel ruins, and have perished in the sea; at others I think he may voluntarily have left Greylands that night, and will some day or other reappear as unexpectedly. His father Basil was given to these impromptu flights, you know."

"But this is all supposition?"

"Undoubtedly it is. Then who was it they watched into the Keep, you ask?—that is the most singular statement of all. My opinion is that no one entered it; John Bent's eyesight deceived him."

"And now one more question, James," resumed the Squire, insensibly returning to the more familiar address of former days: "is Greylands' Rest yours, or was it left to Basil?"

"It is mine."

"Did it come to you by will?"

For a moment Mr. Castlemaine hesitated before giving an answer. The persistent questioning annoyed him; and yet he did not know how to escape it.

"It became mine by deed of gift."

"Why did you not produce the deed to Anthony?"

"I might have done so, had he waited. He was too impatient,

I *should* have done so"—and the emphasis here was marked. "To no one excepting yourself have I acknowledged as much, Squire Dobie. I recognize in none the right to question me."

Squire Dobie rose, taking his hat and stick from the side-table where he had laid them, and held out his hand to Mr. Castlemaine.

"If you are an innocent man, James, and I have said what cannot be justified, I heartily beg your pardon. Perhaps time will clear up the mystery. Meanwhile, if you will come over to Dobie Hall for a few days, and bring your family with you, I shall be glad to welcome you. Who was that nice-looking woman with the light hair?"

"The light hair?—oh, my little daughter's governess. Madame Guise; a French lady."

"And the very pretty girl who was sitting by you?"

"Miss Reene. She is my wife's step-daughter."

Squire Dobie took his departure, Mr. Castlemaine accompanying him to the hall-door. When outside, the Squire stood for an instant as if deliberating which way to choose—the avenue, or the by-way of Chapel Lane. He took the latter.

"I'll see this Commodore Teague and hear his version of it," he said to himself as he went on. "James Castlemaine speaks fairly, but doubts still linger on my mind: though why they should I know not."

Walking briskly up the lane, as he turned into it, came a tall, handsome young fellow, who bore a great resemblance to the Castlemaines. Squire Dobie accosted him.

"You should be James Castlemaine's son, young man."

Harry stopped.

"I am his son."

"Ay. Can't mistake a Castlemaine. I am Squire Dobie. You've heard of the Dobies?"

"Oh dear, yes. I knew Mr. Tom Dobie and the old Squire."

"To be sure. Well, I am the only one left. I have been to pay a visit to your father."

"I hope you found him at home, sir."

"Yes, and have been talking to him. Well, you are a fine young fellow: over six feet, I suppose. I wish I had a son like you! Was that poor cousin of yours, young Anthony—who

seems to have vanished more mysteriously than any one ever vanished yet—was he a Castlemaine?"

"Not in height: he was rather short. But he had a regular Castlemaine face; as good-looking as they say my uncle Basil used to be."

"What has become of him?"

"I don't know. I wish I did know!" Harry added earnestly.

They parted. That this young fellow had borne no share in the business, and would be glad to find its clue, Squire Dobie saw. Turning down the little path, when he came to it, that led to the Hutt, he knocked at the door.

Commodore Teague was at dinner: taking it in the kitchen to save trouble. But he had the free and easy manners of a sailor, and ushered in his unknown guest without ceremony, and gave him the best seat, while the Squire introduced himself and his object in calling.

Squire Dobie?—come to know about that business of young Mr. Castlemaine's, and how he got lost and where he went to: well, in his opinion it was all just moonshine. Yes, moonshine; and perhaps it might be also Squire Dobie's opinion that it was moonshine, if he could get to the top and the bottom of it. Couldn't be a doubt that the young man had come out o' the Keep after going into it—'twasn't likely he'd stay long in that ghostly place—and went off somewhere of his own accord. That's what he, Jack Teague, thought: though he wouldn't answer for it, neither, that the young fellow might not have made a false step on the slippery rocks, and gone head foremost down to Davy Jones's locker. The shot and scream? Didn't believe there ever was a scream that night; thought John Bent dreamt it; and the shot came from himself, Teague; after cleaning his gun he loaded it and fired it off. The most foolish thing in it all was to suspect the Master of Greylands of marching into the Keep. As if he'd want to go there at midnight! or at any other time, for the matter of that. Mr. Castlemaine left his place between eleven and half-after; and he, Jack Teague, saw him go up the lane towards his house with his own eyes: 'twasn't likely he'd come *down* again for the purpose of waylaying young Anthony, or what not.

And this was the substance of all that the anxious old friend

of Basil Castlemaine could obtain from Commodore Teague. The Commodore seemed to be a rough, honest, jovial sort of man, incapable of deceit, or of double-dealing: and, indeed, as Squire Dobie asked himself, why should he be guilty of it in this matter? He went away fairly puzzled, not knowing what to think; and leaving behind him the aroma proceeding from the Commodore's savoury stew, which was now getting cold on the table. But why it should have pleased the Commodore to favour Squire Dobie with the rough and ready manners and the loose grammar he used to the common people of Greylands, instead of being the gentleman he could be when he chose, was best known to himself.

Crossing the road, as he emerged from the lane, the Squire entered the chapel ruins, and went to the edge of the land there. He saw the narrow, tortuous, and certainly, for those who had not a steady foot and head, dangerous path that led to the strip of beach below: not discernible now, for it was high water. The path was rarely trodden by man: the reputation of the Friar's Keep kept the village away from it: and, otherwise, there was no possible inducement to tempt men down it. Neither, as some instinct taught Squire Dobie, had it been taken that night by young Anthony Castlemaine.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE CHAPEL RUINS.

Madame Guise sat buried in reverie. Ethel was reading a French book aloud; Flora was practising: but madame, supposed to be listening to both, heard neither the one nor the other.

Every moment of the hours that had passed since she saw the diamond ring of her unfortunate husband concealed in Mr. Castlemaine's bureau had been one of agony. The fright and horror she had experienced in the search was also telling upon her: her head ached, her pulses throbbed, her brain was fevered: and but for the dread of drawing attention to herself, that, in her nervousness, she feared might lead to suspicion, she would have pleaded illness and asked permission to remain that day in her chamber. No one but herself knew how she shrank

from Mr. Castlemaine: she could not be in the same room with him without feeling faint; to sit next to him at the dinner-table was nothing less than torture. The finding of the ring was a proof to her that her husband had in truth met with the awful fate suspected; concealing the ring in the bureau, a sure and certain sign that Mr. Castlemaine was its author. When they were intruded upon by Squire Dobie with his accusing words, Charlotte Guise had been scarcely able to suppress her emotion. Mr. Castlemaine, catching sight of her face, had attributed its pallor simply to the abrupt introduction of the disagreeable subject: could he have suspected its true cause he would have been far more put out than even by Squire Dobie's words. An idea had crossed Charlotte Guise—what if she were to declare herself to this good old gentleman, and beseech him to take up her cause.

But she did not dare to do so. It was of this she was thinking now, when she ought to have been attending to Flora's imperfect fingering. There were reasons why, as she clearly saw, it might do her harm instead of good. With the one sole exception of the ring, there was no shadow of proof against Mr. Castlemaine: and upon the first breathing of hostilities, how quickly might he not do away with the ring for ever! And, once let it be declared that she was Anthony's wife, that her chief business in the house was to endeavour to track out the past, she would be expelled from it and the door closed against her. How could she then pursue her search? No, she must not risk it.

"I should think I've practised long enough, for one afternoon, madame!"

Flora gave a final dash at the keys as she spoke. Madame looked up languidly.

"Yes, you may close the piano. My head aches painfully, and I cannot properly attend to you."

No need of further permission. Flora shut down the lid and disappeared. Ethel closed her book.

"I beg your pardon for my thoughtlessness, Madame Guise. I ought not to have read to you: I forgot your headache. Can I get you anything for it?"

"Your reading has not harmed me at all, my dear. No, nothing: only time will cure me."

Ethel, who had moved to the window, and was standing at it, suddenly laughed.

"I was thinking of that old gentleman's surprise," she said, "when he saw me here. His looks expressed it. Where do you think he had seen me to-day before, Madame Guise?"

The mention of the old gentleman—Squire Dobie—aroused madame's interest. She lifted her languid head quickly. "I do not know."

"In Mrs. Bent's best kitchen, stoning raisins. I went into the Dolphin to get something for mamma, and began to help Mrs. Bent to do them, for she said she should be late with her pudding. Old Squire Dobie came in and saw me at them. When he found me here at dinner, I know he was puzzled."

"What a—strange manner he had;—what curious things he said to Mr. Castlemaine!" spoke madame, seizing the opportunity.

"Yes," said Ethel, flushing scarlet. "I thought him very rude."

"He seemed to think that—that young Mr. Anthony was really killed in secret."

"You cannot help people thinking things."

"And by Mr. Castlemaine."

"It was very wrong of him; it must be very foolish. I wondor papa took it so calmly."

"*You* do not think it could be so then?"

"*I!* Is it likely, Madame Guise?"

"But suppose—my dear Miss Ethel, suppose some one were to tell you that it was so: that they had proof of it?"

"Proof of what?"

"Proof that Mr. Castlemaine did know what became of—of Mr. Anthony: proof that harm came to him?"

"I should laugh at them," said Ethel.

"And not believe it?"

"No, never."

Ethel left the room with the last words: perhaps to avoid the topic. Madame thought so, and sighed as she looked after her. It was only natural she reflected: when we are fond of people, we neither care to hear ill spoken of them, nor believe the ill; and Ethel was very fond of Mr. Castlemaine. Charlotte Guise did not wonder: but for this dreadful suspicion, she

would have liked him herself. In fact, she had insensibly begun to like him, in spite of her prejudices, until this new and most convincing proof of his guilt was discovered in his bureau: the search for which had cost her conscience so much, had taxed her fears so cruelly, and was giving her so intense a torment now. "I wonder what will come of it all in the end?" she cried, with a slight shiver. "Qui vivra, verra."

One of the Grey Sisters appeared at Greylands' Rest by-and-by, bringing up little Marie Guise. It was Sister Ruth. Mrs. Castlemaine had graciously invited the child to take tea with her mother. But Mrs. Castlemaine was one who rarely did a kindness without some latent motive—generally a selfish one. Marie was beginning to speak a little English; but never willingly; never when her French could by any possibility be understood. To her mother she invariably spoke in French; and Mrs. Castlemaine had made the discovery that, to hear the child and her mother speaking together, might improve Flora's accent. So Madame Guise was quite at liberty to have Marie up to tea as often as she liked.

"Do you remember your papa, dear?" asked Mrs. Castlemaine in English, as they sat round the tea-table; Mr. Castlemaine having gone to dine at the Dolphin.

"Sais pas," responded Marie, hanging her head shyly.

"Do you like England better than France, Marie?" went on Mrs. Castlemaine.

"Sais pas," repeated the child unwillingly, as if she meant to cry.

"How is the little burnt girl? Better?"

"Sais pas."

Evidently it was unprofitable work, examining Miss Marie Guise. Ethel laughed, and began talking to her in French. At best, she was but a timid little thing.

Madame Guise started at dusk to take her home; proceeding down the wide avenue and the high-road. At the door of the Dolphin stood Mrs. Bent, a large cooking-apron tied round her waist. She was wiping a cut-glass jug with a soft cloth, and apparently had stepped to the door whilst giving some directions to Ned, the man: who stood ready to run off somewhere without his hat.

"Mind, Ned; the very best mocha. And unless it is the

best, don't bring it. I'd sooner use what I've got in the house."

Ned started off down the road in the direction of the beach: no doubt to Pike, the grocer's. Mrs. Bent was turning in again, when she caught sight of Madame Guise and little Marie.

"You are busy this evening," said madame.

"We've a dinner on," replied Mrs. Bent, stooping to kiss Marie, of whom she had grown very fond during the child's sojourn at the inn. "And I had no notice of it till midday—which of course makes one all the busier. I like to get things forward the day beforehand, and not leave 'em to the last minute: but if you don't know of it you can't do that."

"A dinner? Yes, I think I heard it said at home that Mr. Castlemaine was dining at the Dolphin."

"He is here, for one. There are five altogether. Captain Scott—some grand man, they say, who goes about to look up the coastguard in places; and Superintendent Nettleby; and Mr. Blackett of the Grange. Lawyer Knivett of Stilborough makes the fifth, a friend of Captain Scott's. And I must run in, ma'am, for I'm wanted all ways at once this evening."

Madame Guise passed on to the Nunnery, and entered it with the child. Sister Betsy shook her head, intimating that it was late for the little one to come in, considering that she had not long recovered from an illness: and she carried her off at once.

This left Madame Guise alone with Miss Castlemaine. Mary Ursula sat away from the light, doing nothing: an unusual thing, for the Sisters made it a point to be always employed.

"You are thinking me very idle," she said to Madame Guise in a tone of half apology for being caught with her hands before her. "But the truth is, I am feeling very tired this evening; unequal to work. I had a sleepless night, and got up with a headache this morning."

"I, too, had a sleepless night," said Madame Guise, forgetting caution in the sympathy of the moment. "Troubles were tormenting me."

"What troubles have you?" asked Mary Ursula, in kind, gentle tones. "You are satisfied with the care the Sisters give your little one?"

"Oh, quite; quite. I am sure she is happy here."

"And you have told me that she and you are alone in the world."

Madame Guise untied her bonnet, and laid it on the chair beside her, before replying.

"Most of us have our troubles in one shape or another, I suppose; sometimes they are of a nature that we do not care to speak of. It is that thing the English call a skeleton in the closet. But—pardon me, Miss Castlemaine—you and I are both young to have already found our skeleton."

"True," said Mary Ursula: and for a moment she was silent from delicacy, intending to drop the subject. But her goodness of heart induced her to speak again.

"You are a lonely exile here, madame: the land and its people are strange to you. If you have any source of trouble or care that it would be a comfort to you to share with another, or that I could in any way help to alleviate, impart it to me. You shall find me a true friend."

Just for one delusive instant, the impulse to take this grand and sweet lady into her confidence; to say to her I am trying to trace out my poor husband's fate; swayed Charlotte Guise. The next, she remembered that it must not be; she was Miss Castlemaine, the niece of her great enemy.

"You are only too good and kind," she rejoined in sad, faint tones. "I wish I could do so; I should ask nothing better: but there are some burthens we must bear alone."

"Are you quite comfortable at Greylands' Rest?" asked Mary Ursula, unable to repress the suspicion that Mrs. Castlemaine's temper or her young daughter's insolence might be rendering the governess's position trying.

"Yes—pretty well. That is, I should be," she hastily added, speaking impulsively, "if I were quite sure the house was an honest one."

"An honest one!" echoed Mary Ursula, in undisguised astonishment, a haughty flush dyeing her face. "What do you mean?"

"Ah, pardon me, madam! It may be that I mistake the term—I am not English."

"But what do you mean?"

Madame Guise looked full at the questioner. She spoke after a short consideration, dropping her voice to a whisper.

"I would like to know—to feel sure—that Mr. Castlemaine did not do anything with that poor young man, his nephew."

Mary Ursula sat half confounded—the rejoinder was so very unexpected, the subject so disagreeable.

"At least, Madame Guise, that cannot be any affair of yours."

"You are angry with me, madam; your words are cold, your tones offended. The first evening that I arrived at Greylands I chanced to hear about that young man. Molly, the servant at the inn, came up to help me make tisane for my little child, and she talked. She told of the young man's strange disappearance, saying he was supposed to have been murdered: and that Mr. Castlemaine knew of it. It had a great effect upon me, that history; I was cold and miserable, and my little one was ill: I could not get it out of my mind."

"I think you might have done so by this time," frigidly remarked Mary Ursula.

"But it comes up now and again," she rejoined, "and that keeps the remembrance alive. Events bring it up. Only to-day, when we had not left the dinner-table, some stranger came pushing his way into the room behind Miles, asking Mr. Castlemaine what he had done with Basil's son, young Anthony. It put Mr. Castlemaine out; I saw his face change; and he sent us all from the room."

Mary Ursula forgot her coldness. It was this very subject that had deprived her of sleep in the past night; though she could no more confess it to Madame Guise than the latter could confess. The two were playing unconsciously at hide-and-seek with one another.

"Who was the stranger, Madame Guise?"

"Mr. Castlemaine called him Squire Dobie. They were together very long. Mr. Castlemaine, I say, did not like it; one might see that. Oh, when I think of what might have happened that night to the young Anthony, it makes me shudder."

"The best thing you can do is *not* to think of it, Madame Guise. It is nothing to you, one way or the other. And it is scarcely in good taste to be suspicious of Mr. Castlemaine whilst you are eating his bread. Rely upon it, when this matter has been cleared up—if it is ever cleared—Mr. Castlemaine will be found as good and honest and innocent as you are."

The Sisters' supper-bell rang out. Madame Guise put her bonnet on, and rose.

"Do forgive me," she whispered with deprecation. "I ought not to have mentioned it to you; I did not wish to offend, or to hurt your feelings. But I am very lonely here; I have but my own heart to commune with."

"And thought is free," reflected Mary Ursula. "It was only natural that the mysterious story should affect her." And in heart she excused the stranger.

"Be at ease," she said, taking madame's hand. "Dismiss it from your mind. It is not a thing that need trouble *you*, Madame Guise."

"Not trouble me!" repeated Madame Guise to herself, as she went through the gate. "It is me alone that it ought to trouble, of all the wide world."

She turned to the right, intending to go home by Chapel Lane, instead of crossing to the open road; but to pass the Friar's Keep at any period of the day, and especially at night, had for Charlotte Guise an irresistible fascination. Some instinct within her, whether true or false, was always whispering that it was there she must seek for traces of her husband.

She reached the gate of the ruins, hesitated, and then entered it. The same fascination that drew her to pass the Friar's Keep on her road home, caused her to enter the ruins that led to it. A shiver, induced by nervousness, seized her as she closed the gate behind her; she did not pass into the Keep, but crossed over to the edge of the cliff. The sea and the boats on it seemed company to her.

Not that many boats could be seen. Two or three, fishing lower down beyond the village, rather far off, in fact; but their lights betrayed them, and it made her feel less lonely. It was not a very light night: no moon, and the stars faintly glimmered; but the atmosphere was clear, and the moss-covered wall of the Friar's Keep with its gothic doorway might be very distinctly seen.

"If I only dared go in and search about!—with a lantern or something of that sort!" she said to herself, glancing towards it. "I might come upon some token, some bit of his dress, perhaps, that had been torn away in the struggle. For a struggle there must have been. Anthony was brave, and he

would not let them take his life without fighting for it. Unless they shot him without warning!"

Burying her face in her hands, she shudderingly rehearsed what that struggle had probably been. It was foolish to do this, for it gave her unnecessary pain: but she had fallen into the habit of indulging these thoughts instead of checking them; and perhaps they came unbidden. You must not cherish your sorrow, we say to some friend who is overwhelmed with grief and despair. No, answers the poor sufferer: but how can I help it? Just so was it with Charlotte Guise. Day by day, night by night, she saw only her husband and his unhappy fate; she was as one sick in some fever dream, whose poor brain has caught up one idea and rambles upon it for ever.

She turned towards the old building, but not very courageously: at the best, it was a ghostly-looking place at night: and then turned again and once more gazed out to sea.

"No, I cannot enter. I have not the bravery to go in alone; even if I could secure a lantern. There's that ghost that comes; and it might appear to me. I saw it as distinctly last night from Mr. Castlemaine's window as I ever saw anything in my life. And if I were here, and it appeared to me, I should die of fear. I think I half died of fear last night——"

A sound behind her at this moment caused Charlotte Guise to think she should die of fear now. The gate was opening, and in terror she crouched against the wall. There she cowered, her black clothes drawn round her, suppressing the cry that would have risen to her lips, and praying to escape detection.

She did escape it. It was Harry Castlemaine who had entered. He advanced to the edge of the cliff, but not near to her, and stood for a few moments, apparently looking out to sea. Then he pushed open the gothic door, and passed into the Friar's Keep.

What was Charlotte Guise to do? Should she make a dart for the gate, running the risk of his coming out again and pouncing upon her? or should she stay where she was until he had gone again? She decided upon the former, for her situation was intolerable. After all, if he did see her, she must make the excuse that she had crossed the ruins to take a look at the beautiful sea: he could not surely suspect anything from that!

But this was not to be accomplished. She was just about to glide from her hiding-place, when the gate again opened, and some other figure, after looking cautiously about, came into the ruins. A woman's light figure, enveloped in a dark cloak, its hood partly concealing the head and face. It crossed the ruins, and then stood at the edge, under cover of the Keep, gazing attentively out to sea. Madame Guise was at the opposite corner close to the wall of the Nunnery, and watched all this. By the glimpse of the profile partly turned towards her, she thought it was the young girl they called Jane Hallet.

Slowly turning from the sea, the girl was apparently about to steal back again, when she suddenly drew against the old wall of the Friar's Keep, and crouched there. At the same moment, Harry Castlemaine came out of the Keep, strode with a quick step to the gate, and passed through it. The girl had evidently heard him coming out, and wished to avoid him. He crossed the road to Chapel Lane; and she, after taking another steady look across the sea, quitted the ruins also, and went down the hill in the direction of her home.

Charlotte Guise breathed again. Apart from her husband's disappearance and the tales of the ghost she so dreaded, Charlotte could not help thinking that things connected with the Friar's Keep looked romantic and mysterious. Giving ample time for Harry Castlemaine to pass half-way up the lane on his road home, she entered the lane herself, after glancing up at the two windows, behind which the Grey Friar was wont to appear. All was dark and silent there to-night.

She had not gone ten paces up the lane, when quick, firm footsteps were heard behind her: those of the Master of Greylands. Not caring to encounter him, still less that he should know she chose that lonely road for returning home at night, she drew aside amongst the trees. He turned down to the Hutt, and Madame Guise went hastening onwards.

Mr. Castlemaine was on his way homewards from the dinner at the Dolphin. When the party broke up, he had given his arm to Nettleby the superintendent; who had decidedly taken as much as he could conveniently carry. It pleased the Master of Greylands, in spite of his social superiority, to make much of the superintendent as a general rule; he was always cordial

with him. Captain Scott had taken the same—for in those days hard drinking was thought less of than it is in these—and had fallen asleep in one of John Bent's good old-fashioned chairs. As Mr. Castlemaine came out of the superintendent's gate after seeing him safely indoors, he found himself confronted by Lawyer Knivett.

"Why, Knivett, is it you?" he exclaimed. "I thought you and the captain were already on your road to Stilborough."

"Time enough," replied the lawyer. "Will you take a stroll on the beach? It's a fine night."

Mr. Castlemaine passed his arm within the speaker's, and they crossed over in that direction. Both of them were as sober as judges. It was hardly light enough to see much of the beauty of the sea; but Mr. Knivett professed to enjoy it, saying he had no chance of its breezes at Stilborough. In point of fact, he had something to say to the Master of Greylands, and did not care to enter upon the subject abruptly.

"Weary work, it must be, for those night fishermen!" remarked the lawyer, pointing to two or three stationary lights in the distance.

"They are used to it, Knivett."

"I suppose so. Use goes a great way in life. By the way, Mr. Castlemaine—it has just occurred to me—I wish you'd let me give you a word of advice, and receive it in good part."

"What is it? Speak out."

"Could you not manage to produce the deed of tenure by which you own Greylands' Rest?" pursued the lawyer, insensibly dropping his voice.

"I suppose I could, if I chose," replied Mr. Castlemaine, after a scarcely perceptible pause.

"Then I should recommend you to do so. I have wanted to say this to you for some little time; but the truth is, I did not know how you would take it."

"Why have you wanted to say it to me?"

"Well—the fact is, people are talking. People will talk, you know! If you could contrive to let some one see the deed—of course you wouldn't seem to show it purposely—by which you hold the property, the world would be convinced that you had no reason to—to wish young Anthony out of the way, and would stop its foolish tongue. *Do so*, Mr. Castlemaine."

"I conclude you mean to insinuate that the world is saying *I* put Anthony out of the way."

"Something of that sort. Oh, people are simpletons at the best. Of course, there's nothing in it; they are sure of that; but, don't you perceive that, once let them know young Anthony's pretensions had not a leg to stand upon, and they would see there was no mo—in fact, they'd shut up at once," broke off the lawyer, feeling that he might be treading on dangerous ground. "If you have the deed at hand, let it be seen one of these first fine days by some worthy man whose word can be taken."

"And that would stop the talking, you say?"

"Undoubtedly it would. It would be proof that you, at least, could have no motive for wishing Anthony elsewhere," added the lawyer, more boldly.

"Then, listen to my answer, Knivett: NO. I will never show it for any such purpose; never as long as I live. If the world likes to talk, let it talk."

"It does talk," urged the lawyer, ruefully.

"It is quite welcome to talk, for me. I am astonished at you, Knivett; you might have known me better than to suggest such a thing. But that you were so valued by my father, and so respected by me, I should have knocked you down."

The haughty spirit of the Master of Greylands had been aroused: he spoke coldly, proudly, and resentfully. Mr. Knivett knitted his brow: but he had partly expected this.

"The suggestion was made in friendliness," he said.

"Of course. But it was a mistake. We will forget it, Knivett."

They shook hands in silence. Mr. Knivett crossed to the inn, where the fly waited to convey himself and Captain Scott to Stilborough; and the Master of Greylands had then commenced his walk homewards, taking the road that led through Chapel Lane.

CHAPTER XXII.

MISS HALLET'S FRIGHT.

MISS HALLET stood in the parlour of her pretty cottage on the cliff. For a wonder, she was doing nothing—being usually a most industrious body. As she stood upright in deep thought, her spare, up-and-down figure motionless, her pale face still, it might be seen that some matter was troubling her mind. The matter was this: Jane (as she phrased it to herself) was getting beyond her.

A week or more had elapsed since the night Jane had made the accident to Polly Gleeson an excuse for staying out late. Children were not being burnt every night,—and yet the fault continued. Each night, since then, had she been out, and stayed later than she ought to stay: a great deal later than her aunt considered was at all proper or expedient. On the previous night, Miss Hallet had essayed to stop it. When Jane put on her cloak to take what she called her run down the cliff, Miss Hallet in her stern, quiet way, had said: "You are not going this evening, Jane." Jane's answer had been: "I must go, aunt; I have something to do,"—and she went.

"What's to be done if she won't mind me?" deliberated Miss Hallet. "I can't lock her up: she's too old for that. What she can possibly want, flying down the cliff night after night, passes my comprehension. As to sitting with Goody Dance or any other old fish-wife, as Jane sometimes tells me she has been doing, I don't believe a word of it. It's not in the nature of young girls to shut themselves up so much with the aged. Why, I have heard Jane call *me* old behind my back —and I want a good twenty or thirty years of old Dame Dance's age."

Miss Hallet stopped a minute, to listen to sounds overhead. Jane was up there making the beds. She soon resumed her reflections.

"No, it's not old Mother Dance, or any other old mother. It's her love of gossip. When young girls get together, they'd talk of the moon if there was no other subject at hand—chattering geese! But that there's not a young fellow in the

whole village that Jane would condescend to look at, I might think she had picked up a sweetheart. She holds herself too high for any of them. And quite right too: she *is* above them. They are but a parcel of poor fishers: and as to that young Pike, who serves in his father's shop, he has no more sense in him, and Jane knows it, than a kite's tail. No, it's not sweethearts! it's dawdling and gossip along with Susan Pike and the rest of the foolish girls. But oh, how things have changed! —to think that Jane Hallet should consort with them!"

Miss Hallet lifted her eyes to the ceiling, as though she could see what Jane was about. By the sound it seemed that she was sweeping the carpet.

"She is a good girl on the whole; I own that," went on Miss Hallet. "Up betimes in a morning, and keeping steady to whatever she has to do, whether it be house-work or sewing: and never gadding in the daytime. The run in the evening does her good, she says: perhaps so: but the staying out late doesn't. I don't like to be harsh with her," continued Miss Hallet, after a pause. "She stands alone, save for me, now her brother's gone—and she grieves after him still. Moreover, I am not sure that Jane would stand any harsh authority, if I attempted it. Poor George never would—though I am sure I only wanted to control him for his good: he went off and made a home for himself down in the village: and Jane has a touch of her brother's spirit. There's the difficulty."

At this moment Jane ran down the stairs with a broom and dust-pan, and went into the kitchen. Presently she came forth in her bonnet and shawl, a small basket in her hand.

"Where are you off to?" asked Miss Hallet, snappishly. For if she acknowledged to herself that Jane was a good girl, there was no necessity to let Jane know it. And Miss Hallet was one of those rigid, well-meaning people who can hardly ever speak to a friend or foe without appearing cross. All for their good, of course: as this tart tone was for Jane's.

"To buy the eggs, aunt. You told me I was to go for them when I had done the rooms."

"I'll go for the eggs myself," said Miss Hallet, "I won't be beholden to you for my errands. Take your bonnet off and get to your work. Those handkerchiefs of Mrs. Castlemaine's don't seem to progress very quickly."

"They are all finished except one, aunt. There have been the initial letters to work—which Mrs. Castlemaine decided upon afterwards; and the letters take time."

"Take off your things, I say."

Jane went away with her bonnet and shawl, came back, and sat down to her sewing. She did not say, Why are you so angry with me? she knew quite well why it was, and preferred to avoid unsatisfactory topics. Miss Hallet deliberately attired herself, and went out for the eggs. They kept no servant: the ordinary work of the house was light: and when rougher labour was required, a woman came in from the village to do it. The Hallets were originally of fairly good descent. Miss Hallet had been well reared, and her instincts were undoubtedly those of a gentlewoman: but when in early life she found that she would have to turn out in the world and work for her living, it was a blow she could never get over. A feeling of blight took possession of her even now when she looked back at that time. In the course of years she retired on the money bequeathed to her, and on savings of her own. Her brother (who had never risen to be more than the captain of a small schooner) had then become a widower with two children. He died: and these children were left to the mercy of the world, very much as he and his sister had been left some twenty years before. Miss Hallet took to them. George was drowned: it has been already stated: Jane was with her still; and, as the reader sees, was not altogether giving satisfaction. In Miss Hallet's opinion, Jane's destiny was already fixed: she would lead a single life, and grow gradually into an old maid, as she herself had done. Miss Hallet considered it the best destiny Jane could desire: whether it was so or not, there seemed to be no help for it. Men whom she would have deemed Jane's equals, were above them in position: and she believed Jane would not look at an inferior. So Miss Hallet had continued to live on in her somewhat isolated life; civil to the people around her but associating with none; and always conscious that her fortunes and her merits were at variance with each other.

She attired herself in a rather handsome shawl and close straw bonnet, and went down the cliff after the required eggs. Jane sat at the open parlour-window, busy with the last of Mrs. Castlemaine's handkerchiefs. She wore her neat morning print

gown, with its small white collar and bow of fresh lilac ribbon, and looked cool and pretty. Miss Hallet grumbled frightfully at anything like extravagance in dress; but at the same time would have rated Jane soundly had she seen her anything but nice in any one particular. When the echo of her aunt's footsteps had quite died away, Jane laid the handkerchief on the table, and took from her pocket some other material, which she began to work at stealthily.

Yes, stealthily. For she glanced cautiously around as if the very moss on the cliff side would take note of it, and she kept her ears well on the alert, to guard against surprise. Miss Hallet had told her she did not get on very quickly with the handkerchiefs: but Miss Hallet did not know, or suspect, that when she herself was away from observation, or Jane was safely shut up in her own room—the handkerchiefs were discarded for this other work. And yet, the work presented no singular or unpleasant features. It looked like a strip of fine lawn, and was just as snowy as the cambric on the table.

Jane's fingers quickly plied their needle and thread. Presently she slipped a pattern of thin paper out of her pocket, unfolded it, and began to cut the lawn according to its fashion. Whilst thus occupied, her listening ear caught the sound of approaching footsteps: in a moment, pattern and work were in her pocket again out of sight, and she was diligently hemstitching the handkerchief.

A tall, plain girl darkened the window: Miss Susan Pike, daughter of Pike, the well-to-do grocer and general dealer. Deep down in Jane Hallet's heart there had always lain an instinctive consciousness, warning her that she was superior to this girl, as well as to Matty Nettleby; of quite a different order: but the young crave companionship, and will have it, suitable or unsuitable, where it is to be had. The only young *lady* in the place was Ethel Reene, and Jane Hallet's good sense told her that companionship with her would be just as unsuitable the other way: she might as well aspire to an intimacy with a duchess's daughter as with Miss Reene.

"Well, you *are* hard at work this morning, Jane!" was Miss Susan Pike's unceremonious and somewhat resentful salutation, as she put her hands upon the window-sill and her head inside. For she did not at all favour work herself.

"Will you come in?" returned Jane, rising and withdrawing the bolt of the door: which she had fastened after the departure of her aunt.

"Them are Mrs. Castlemaine's handkerchiefs, I suppose," observed Susan, responding to the invitation and taking a chair. "Fine cambric, isn't it! Well, Jane, you do hem-stitch well, I must say."

"I have to work her initials on them also," remarked Jane. "S. C."

"S. C.," repeated Miss Pike. "What do the S. stand for? What's her Chris'en name?"

"Sophia."

"Sophia!—that is a smart name. Do you work the letters in satin stitch?"

"Yes. With the dots on each side."

"You learnt all that fine hem-stitching and broider-work at the Nunnery, Jane—and your aunt knows how to do it too, I suppose. *I* shouldn't have patience for it. I'd rather lade out treacle all day: and of all precious disagreeable articles our shop serves, treacle's the worst. I broke a basin yesterday morning, lading it out," continued Miss Susan. "Sister Phœby came in for a pound of it, to make the ladies a pudding for dinner, she said; and I let her basin drop. Didn't mother rate me!"

"Did Sister Phœby say how the child was getting on?"

"Polly's three parts well, I think. Old Parker does not go across there any more. Jane, I came up to ask if you'd come with me to Stilborough this afternoon?"

"I can't," said Jane. "My aunt has been very angry with me this morning. I should no more dare to ask her to let me go to Stilborough to-day than I should dare to fly."

"What has she been angry about?"

"Oh, about my not getting on with my work, and one thing and another," replied Jane, carelessly. "She would not let me fetch some eggs just now; has gone herself. And she knows that in a few days' time I shall have to go to Stilborough on my own account."

"She's a nice article for an aunt!" grumbled Miss Susan. "I've to order in some things for the shop, and I thought it would be pleasant for us to walk there together. You are *sure* you can't come, Jane?"

"Quite sure. It is of no use thinking of it."

"I must ask Matty Nettleby, then. But I'd rather have had you."

Miss Susan fingered discontentedly, one by one, the scissors, cotton, and other articles in Jane's work-box. She was not of amiable temper.

"Well, it's a bother! I can't think what right aunts have to domineer over folks! And I must be off to keep shop, or I shall have mother about me. Father has one of his liver bouts, and is lying abed till dinner-time."

"I wish you'd bring me a pound of wool from Stilborough, Susan? You know where I buy it."

"Let's have the number, then."

Jane gave her a skein of the size and colour wanted, and the money for the purchase. "I'll come down for it this evening," she said. "You'll be back by then."

"All right. Good-bye, Jane."

"Good-bye," returned Jane. And as the damsel's fleet steps carried her down the cliff, Jane bolted the door again, put the cambric handkerchief aside, and took the other work out of her pocket.

Meanwhile Miss Hallet had reached the village. Not very speedily. When she went out—which was seldom—she liked to take her leisure over it. She turned aside to Tim Gleeson's cottage, to inquire after Polly; she halted at the door of two or three more poor fishermen's huts to give them good-morrow, or ask after the little ones. Miss Hallet's face was cold, her manner harsh: but she felt for the troubles of the world, and gave what help she could to the poor folk around her.

The old woman from whom she bought her eggs lived in a small cottage past the Dolphin Inn. Miss Hallet had her basket filled, paid, and talked a bit with the woman. In returning, Mrs. Bent was at the inn door, in her chintz gown and cherry cap-ribbons.

"Is it you, Miss Hallet! How are you this morning?"

"Quite well," replied Miss Hallet, in her prim way.

"Been getting some eggs, I see," ran on Mrs. Bent, unceremoniously. "It's not often *you* come down to do your own errands. Where's Jane?"

"I left her at work," was the answer. "Jane does not get through her sewing as quickly as she might, and I have been telling her of it."

"You can't put old heads upon young shoulders," cried Mrs. Bent. "Girls like to be idle; and that's the truth. What do you suppose I caught that Molly of mine at, last night? Stuck down at the kitchen-table, writing a love-letter."

Miss Hallet had her eyes bent on her eggs, as though she were counting them.

"Writing a letter, if you'll believe me! And a fine thing of a letter it was! Smudged with ink, and the writing like nothing on earth but spiders' legs in a fit. I ordered it to be put on the fire. She's not going to waste her time scribbling to sweethearts whilst she stays with me."

"Did she rebel?" quickly asked Miss Hallet.

"Rebel! Molly! I should like to see her attempt it. She was just as sheepish as a calf at being found out, and sent the paper into the fire quicker than I could order it in."

Gossip about Mrs. Bent's Molly, or any other Molly, was never satisfactory to Miss Hallet. She broke the subject by inquiring after John Bent's health, preparatory to pursuing her way.

"Oh, he's well enough," was Mrs. Bent's answer. "It's not often men get anything the matter with them. If they were possessed of as much common sense as they are of health, I'd say it was a blessing. That weak-souled husband of mine, seeing Molly piping and sniffing last night, told me privately that he saw no harm in love-letters."

"I am glad Mr. Bent is well," said Miss Hallet, taking a step onwards. "Jane told me last week he was ill."

"He had a bilious attack. Jane came in the same night and saw him with his head on a cushion. By the way—look here, Miss Hallet—talking about Jane—I wouldn't let her be out quite so much after dark, if I were you."

No words could have been more unwelcome to Miss Hallet than these. She was a very proud woman, never brooking advice of any sort. In her heart she regarded Jane as being so infinitely superior to all Greylands, the Greylands' Rest family and the doctor's excepted, that any reproach cast on her seemed nothing less than a presumption. It might please herself to

reflect upon her niece for gadding about, but it did not please her that others should do so.

"Young girls like their fling; I know that," went on Mrs. Bent, who never held her peace for any one. "To coop 'em up in a pen, like a parcel of old hens, doesn't do. But there's reason in all things: and it seems to me that Jane's out night after night."

"My niece comes down the cliff for a run at dusk, when it is too dark to sew," stiffly responded Miss Hallet. "I have yet to learn, Mrs. Bent, what harm the run can do to her or to you."

"None to me, certainly; I hope none to her. I see her in Mr. Harry Castlemaine's company a little oftener than I should choose a girl of mine to be in it. I do not say it is for any harm; don't take up that notion, Miss Hallet; but Mr. Harry's not the right sort of man, being a gentleman, for Jane to make a companion of."

"And who says Jane makes him her companion?"

"I do. She is with him more than's suitable. And—Miss Hallet, if I'm saying this to you, it is with a good motive and because I have a true regard for Jane, so I hope you will take it in the friendly spirit it's meant. If they walked together by daylight, I wouldn't think so much of it, though in my opinion that would not be the proper thing, considering the difference between them, who he is and who she is: but it is not by daylight, it is after dark."

Miss Hallet felt a sudden chill run through her—as though some one were pouring cold water down her back. But she was bitterly resentful, and very difficult to convince. Mrs. Bent saw the proud lines of the cold face.

"Look here, Miss Hallet. I don't say there's any harm come of it, or likely to come: if I'd thought that, I'd have told you before. Girls are more heedless than the wind, and when they are as pretty as Jane, young men like to talk to them. Mr. Harry is in and about the village at night—he often says to me how dull his own home is—and he and Jane chance to meet somewhere or other, and they talk and laugh together, roaming about while they do it. That's the worst of it, I hope: but it is not a prudent thing for Jane to do."

"Jane stays down here with her friends; she is never at a

loss for companions," resentfully spoke Miss Hallet. "She sits with old Goody Dance: and she is a good deal with Miss Nettleby and with Pike's daughter; sometimes staying in one place, sometimes in another. Why, one evening last week—Thursday was it? yes, Thursday—she said she was here, helping you."

"So she was here. We had a party in the best room that night. Jane ran in; and, seeing how busy I was, she helped me to wash up the glass: she's always good-natured and ready to forward one. She stayed here till half-past eight o'clock."

Miss Hallet's face looked grim. It was nearer half-past ten than half-past eight when Miss Jane made her appearance at home—as she well remembered.

"And now don't you go blowing up Jane through what I've said," enjoined Mrs. Bent. "We were young ourselves once, and liked our liberty. She's thoughtless; that's all; if she were a few years older, she would have the sense to know that folks might get talking about her. Just give her a caution, Miss Hallet: and remind her that Mr. Harry Castlemaine is just about as far above her and us, as the moon's higher than that old weather-cock on the top of the Nunnery."

Miss Hallet went homewards with her eggs. She had perfect confidence in Jane, in her conduct and principles. Jane, as she believed, would never make a habit of walking with Mr. Harry Castlemaine, or he with her: they both possessed too much common sense. Unless—and a flush illumined Miss Hallet's face at the sudden thought—unless they had fallen into some foolish, fancied love affair with one another.

"Such things have happened before now, of course," reasoned Miss Hallet as she began her ascent of the cliff: but her tone was dubious, almost as though she would have liked to be able to tell herself that they never had happened. "But they would know better; both of them; remembering that nothing could come of it. As to walking together—I believe that's three parts Mrs. Bent's imagination. It is not *likely* to be true. Good-morning, Darke!"

A fisherman in a red cap, jolting down the cliff, had saluted Miss Hallet in passing. She went on with her thoughts.

"Suppose I watch Jane a bit? There's nothing I should so much hate as to speak to her upon a topic such as this, and

then find I had spoken without cause. It would be derogatory to her and to me. Yes," added Miss Hallet with decision, "that will be the best plan. The next time Jane goes out at dusk, I'll follow her."

The next time happened to be that same evening. Miss Hallet gave not a word of scolding to Jane all day: and the latter kept diligently to her work at Mrs. Castlemaine's handkerchief. At dusk Jane put her warm dark cloak on, and the soft quilted bonnet.

"Where are you going to-night?" questioned Miss Hallet, with a stress on the to-night.

"Just down the cliff, aunt. I want the wool Susan Pike was to buy for me at Stilborough."

"Always an excuse for gadding out!" exclaimed Miss Hallet.

"Well, aunt, I must have the wool. I may be wanting it to-morrow."

"You'll toast me two thin bits of toast before going," said the aunt, snappishly.

Jane removed her cloak and proceeded to cut the slices of bread and toast them. But the fire was very low, and they took some time to brown properly.

"Do you wish the toast buttered, aunt?"

"No. Cut it in strips. And now go and draw my ale."

"It is early for supper, aunt."

"Do as you are bid, Jane. If I feel cold, I suppose I am at liberty to take my ale a trifle earlier than usual, to warm me."

Jane drew the ale in a china mug that held exactly half-a-pint, and brought it in. It was Miss Hallet's evening allowance: and she never exceeded it. Her supper frequently consisted of what she was about to take now: strips of toast soaked in the ale: an invention much favoured by elderly people in those days.

Jane resumed her cloak, and was allowed to depart without further hindrance. But, during the detention, the evening had become almost dark. Perhaps Miss Hallet had intended this.

She ate a little of the toast very quickly, drank some of the ale, leaving the rest for her return, and had her own bonnet and shawl on in no time. Then, locking her house-door, she followed in the wake of Jane.

She saw Jane before she reached the foot of the cliff: for the latter's light steps had been detained by encountering Tim and Nancy Gleeson, who could not immediately be dismissed. Miss Hallet halted as a matter of precaution: it would not answer to overtake her. Jane went onwards, and crossed the road to Pike's shop. Miss Hallet stood in the shadow of the cliff and waited.

Waited for a good half-hour. At the end of that time Jane came out again, a paper parcel in her hand. "The wool," thought Miss Hallet. "And *now* where's she going? On to the beach, I shouldn't wonder!"

Not to the beach. Jane came back, and turned the corner that led to the Grey Nunnery. Miss Hallet cautiously crossed the road to follow her. When Miss Hallet had her in view again, Jane had halted, and seemed to be doing something to her cloak. The aunt managed to make out that Jane was drawing its hood over her quilted bonnet, as if to conceal her face. With the loose cloak enveloping her figure, and the hood over her face, Jane's worst enemy would scarcely have known her.

Away she sped again with a swift foot; walking lightly and quickly. The stars were very bright: night reigned. Miss Hallet, spare of form, could walk almost as quickly as Jane, and she kept her in view. Onwards, past the gate of the Nunnery, went Jane to the extreme surprise of Miss Hallet. What could her business be in that lonely road?—a road that she herself, who had more than double the years and courage of Jane, would not have especially chosen as a promenade at night. Could Jane be going up to the coastguard-station, to inquire after Henry Mann's sick wife? What simpletons young girls were! They had no sense: and thought no more of appearances than——

A shrill scream, right over Miss Hallet's head, cut short her reflections, and sent her with a start against the Nunnery palings. It was a bird flying across, from seaward, which had chosen to make known its presence. The incident did not divert her attention from the pursuit for more than an instant: but in that instant she had lost sight of Jane.

What an extraordinary thing! Where was she? How had she vanished? Miss Hallet strained her eyes as she asked

these questions. When the bird suddenly diverted her attention, Jane had almost gained the gate that led into the chapel ruins; might perhaps have been quite close to it. That Jane would not go in *there*, Miss Hallet felt quite convinced; no one would go in. She had not crossed the road to Chapel Lane, or Miss Hallet could not have failed to see her cross it: it was equally certain that she was not in the road now.

Miss Hallet turned about like a bewildered woman. It was an occurrence so mysterious as to savour of unreality. The highway had no trap-doors in it: Jane could not have been caught up into the air.

Miss Hallet walked slowly onwards, marvelling, and gazing about in all directions. When opposite the chapel-gate, she took courage to look through the palings at that ghost-haunted place: but all seemed lonely and silent as the grave. She raised her voice—just as John Bent had once raised his voice in the silent night after the ill-fated Anthony Castlemaine.

"Jane! Jane Hallet!"

"What on earth *can* have become of her?" debated Miss Hallet, as no response was made to the call. "She *can't* have gone up Chapel Lane!"

With a view to seeing—in spite of her conviction—whether Jane was in the lane, Miss Hallet crossed over towards it. She went slowly; glancing around and about her; and had reached the middle of the road when a faint light appeared in one of the windows of the Keep. Miss Hallet had heard that a faint light generally heralded the apparition of the Grey Monk; and she stood transfixed with horror.

A moment later, and the figure in grey cowl and habit glided slowly past the window, lamp in hand. The unhappy lady gave one piercing, terror-stricken scream, and dropped forward in the dusty highway.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SECRET PASSAGE.

The kitchen at the Grey Nunnery was flagged with slate-coloured stone. A spacious apartment: though, it must be confessed, very barely furnished. A dresser, with its shelves, holding plates and dishes; a few pots and pans; some wooden chairs; and a large deal table in the centre of the room, were the principal features that caught the eye.

The time was evening. Three of the Sisters were ironing. Or, to be quite correct, two of them were ironing, and the other, Sister Ann, was attending to the irons at the fire, and to the horse full of freshly ironed clothes, that stood near it. The fire threw its ruddy glow around: upon the plates, of the old willow pattern, ranged on the dresser-shelves, on the tin dish-covers, hanging against the wall, on the ironing-blanket, spread on the large table. One candle only was on the board, for the Sisters were economical, and moreover possessed good eyesight; it was only a common dip in an upright iron candle-stick, and required to be snuffed often. Each of the two Sisters, standing side by side, had her ironing-stand on her right hand, on which she clapped down the iron every few moments. They wore their muslin caps, and ample brown-holland aprons that protected their grey gowns, with over-sleeves of the same material that reached nearly to the elbow.

The Sisters were enjoying a little friendly dispute: for such things (and sometimes not altogether friendly) will take place in the best-regulated communities. Some pea-soup, that had formed a portion of that day's dinner, was not good: each of the three Sisters held her own opinion as to the cause of its defects.

"I tell you it was the fault of the peas," said Sister Caroline, who was cook that week and had made the soup. "You can't make good soup with bad peas. It's not the first time they have sent us bad peas from that place."

"There's nothing the matter with the peas," dissented fat little Sister Phœby, who had to stand in her pattens to obtain proper command of the board whenever it was her turn to iron,

"I know peas when I look at them, I hope, and I say these are good."

"Why, they would not boil at all," retorted Sister Caroline.

"That's because you did not soak them long enough."

"Soaking or not soaking does not seem to make much difference," said the aspersed Sister, shaking out a muslin kerchief violently before spreading it on the blanket. "The last time it was my week for cooking we had pea-soup twice. I soaked the peas for four-and-twenty hours; and yet the soup was found fault with! Give me a fresh iron, please, Sister Ann."

Sister Ann, in taking one of the irons from between the bars of the grate, let it fall with a crash on the purgatory. It made a clatter, and both the ironers looked round. Sister Ann picked it up; rubbed it on the ironing-cloth to see that it was the right heat, put it on Sister Caroline's stand, and took away the cool one.

"The fact is this," she said, putting the latter to the fire, "you can't make pea-soup, Sister Caroline. Now, it's of no use flying out: you *can't make it.* You don't go the right way to make it. You just put on the liquor that the beef or pork has been boiled in, or from bones stewed down, it may be, and you boil the peas in that, and serve it up as pea-soup. Fine soup! No flavour, no goodness, no anything. The stock is good enough: we can't afford better; and nobody need have better: but if you want your pea-soup to be good, you must stew plenty of vegetables in it—carrots especially, and the outside leaves of celery. That will give it a delicious flavour: and you need not use half the quantity of peas if you pass the vegetables with them through the cullender."

"Oh yes!" returned Sister Caroline in sarcastic tones. "*Your* pea-soup is always good: we all know that!"

"And so it is good," answered easy-tempered Sister Ann. "The soup I make is a delicious, palatable soup that any one may enjoy, fit for the table of the Master of Greylands. Just look how your candle wants snuffing!"

Sister Caroline snuffed the candle sharply, and put down the snuffers. She did not like to be found fault with. Sister Phœby, who wanted a fresh iron, went clanking to the fire in her pattens, and took it out for herself, leaving her own in the

bars. Sister Ann was busy just then, turning the clothes on the horse.

"What's the time?" demanded Sister Caroline. "Does any one know?"

"It must have struck half-past eight."

"Was not Sister Margaret to have some arrow-root taken up?"

"Yes, I'll make it," said Sister Ann. "You two keep on with the ironing."

Sister Margaret was temporarily indisposed; the result, Mr. Parker thought, of a chill; and was confined to her bed. Taking a small saucepan from its place, Sister Ann was reaching in the cupboard for the tin of arrow-root, when a tremendous ringing came to the house-bell. Whether it was one prolonged ring, or a succession of rings, they could not tell; but it never ceased, and it alarmed the Sisters. Cries were also heard outside.

"It must be fire!" ejaculated the startled women.

All three rushed out of the kitchen and made for the front-door, Sister Phœby kicking off her pattens that she might run the quicker. Old Sister Mildred, who had become so much better of late that she was about again just as the other ladies were, appeared at the door of the parlour with Sister Mary Ursula.

When the front-door was flung open, some prostrate body in a shawl and bonnet was discovered there, uttering cries and dismal moans. The Sisters hastened to raise her, and found it was Miss Hallet. Miss Hallet covered from head to foot in dust. She staggered in, clinging to them. Jane followed more sedately, but looking white and scared.

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed compassionate Sister Mildred, whose deafness was somewhat better with her improved health, so that she did not always need her new ear-trumpet. "Have you met with an accident, Miss Hallet? Pray come into the parlour."

Seated there in Sister Mildred's own easy-chair, her shawl unfastened by sympathizing hands, her bonnet removed, Miss Hallet's gasps culminated in a fit of hysterics. Between her cries she managed to disclose the truth—the Grey Monk had appeared to her.

Some of the Sisters gave a shiver and drew closer together. The Grey Monk again!

"But all the dust that is upon you?" asked Sister Phœby. "Did the Grey Friar do that?"

In one sense yes, for he had caused it, was the substance of Miss Hallet's answer. The terror he gave her was so great that she had fallen in the dusty road.

In half-a-minute after Miss Hallet's shriek and fall, as related in the last chapter, Jane had run up to her. The impression upon Miss Hallet's mind was that Jane had come up from behind; but Jane seemed to intimate that she had come back from Chapel Lane; and Miss Hallet's perceptions were not in a state to be trusted just then. "What brings you here, aunt? —what are you doing up here?—what's the matter?" asked Jane, essaying to raise her. "Nay," said Miss Hallet, when she could get any words out for fright, "the question is, what brings *you* here?" "I," said Jane; "I was only running to the Hutt, to give Commodore Teague the muffatees I have knitted for him," and out of Jane's pocket came the said muffatees, of a bright plum-colour, in proof of the assertion; though it might be true or it might not. "Has it gone?" faintly asked Miss Hallet. "Has what gone, aunt?" "The Grey Friar. It appeared to me at that window, and down I fell: my limbs failed me." "There—there *is* a faint light," said Jane, looking up for the first time. "Oh, aunt!"

Jane's teeth began to chatter. Miss Hallet, in the extreme sense of terror, and not daring to get up, took a roll or two down the hill in the dust: anything to get away from that dreadful Keep. But it bumped and bruised her: she was no longer young; not to speak of the damage to her clothes, of which she was always careful. So with Jane's help she managed to get upon her feet, and reached the Nunnery somehow; where she seized the bell, and pulled it incessantly until admitted.

"My legs failed me," gasped Miss Hallet, explaining now to the Sisters: "I dropped like a stone in the road, and rolled there in the dust. It was an awful sight," she added, drawing unconsciously on her imagination: "a bluish, greenish kind of light at first; and then a most dreadful, ghostly apparition, with a lamp in its outstretched arm. I wonder I did not die."

Sister Mildred unlocked a cupboard, and produced a bottle of cordial, a recent present from Mrs. Bent: a little of which she administered to the terrified woman. There was no end of confused chattering: a ghost is so exciting a subject to discuss, especially when it has just been seen. Sister Ann compared the present description of the Grey Friar with that which she and Sister Rachel had witnessed, not so long before, and declared the two to tally in every particular. Trembling Sister Judith added her personal testimony. Altogether there had not been so much noise and bustle within the peaceful walls of the Nunnery since that same eventful night, whose doings had been crowned by the arrival of poor little Polly Gleeson with her burns. In the midst of it an idea occurred to Sister Mildred.

"But what brought you up by the Friar's Keep at night, Miss Hallet?" she asked. "It is a lonely road: nobody takes it by choice."

Miss Hallet made no answer. She was gasping again.

"I dare say she was going to see the coastguard's wife, sick Emma Mann," spoke Sister Phœby, heartily. "Don't tease her." And Miss Hallet, catching at the suggestion in her extremity, gave Sister Phœby an assenting nod. It went against the grain to do so, for she was integrity itself, but she would not have these ladies know the truth for the world.

"And Jane had run on to take the mittens to the Commodore, so that you were alone," said Sister Mildred, following out probabilities in her own mind, and nodding pleasantly to Miss Hallet. "I see. Dear me! What a dreadful thing this apparition is!—what will become of us all? I used not to believe in it much."

"Well, you see people have gone past the Keep at night lately more than they used to do: I'm sure one or another seems always to be passing," remarked Sister Ann, sensibly. "We should hear nothing about it now, but for that."

When somewhat recovered, Miss Hallet asked for her bonnet and shawl: which had been taken away to be shaken and brushed. Leaving her thanks with the Sisters, she departed with Jane, and walked home in humility. Now that the present fear had subsided, she felt ashamed of herself for having given way to it, and particularly for having disturbed

the Nunnery in the frantic manner described. But her terror had been real and genuine; and she could no more have controlled it at the time than she could have taken wings and flown away into the air. A staid, well-reared woman like herself, to have made a commotion as though she had been some poor ignorant fish-girl! Miss Hallet walked silently along, keeping her diminished head down as she toiled up the cliff.

When supper and prayers were over that night at the Nunnery, and most of the Grey Ladies had retired to their rooms, Sisters Mildred and Mary Ursula remained alone in the parlour. That they should be conversing upon what had taken place was only natural. Mary Ursula had not, herself, the slightest faith in the supernatural visits of the Grey Friar; who or what it was she knew not, or why it haunted the place, lamp in hand; but she felt assured it would turn out to be a real presence, not a ghostly one. Sister Mildred prudently shook her head at this heterodoxy, confessing that she could not join in it; but she readily agreed that the Friar's Keep was a most mysterious place; and, in the ardour of conversation, she disclosed a secret which very much astonished Mary Ursula. There was an underground passage leading direct from the vaults of the Nunnery to the vaults of the Keep.

"I have known of it for many years," Mildred said, "and never spoken of it to any one. My Sister Mary discovered it: you have heard, I think, that she was one of us in early days: but she died young. After we took possession of this building, Mary, who was lively and active, used to go about, above ground and under, exploring, as she called it. One day she came upon a secret door below, that disclosed a dark, narrow passage: she penetrated some distance into it, but did not care to go on alone. At night, when the rest of the ladies had retired, she and I stayed up together—just as you and I have stayed up to-night, my dear, for it was in this very parlour—and she made me go and explore it with her. We took a lantern, and went. The passage was narrow, as I have said, and apparently built in a long straight line, without turnings, angles, or outlets. Not to fatigue you, I will shortly say, that after going a very long way, as it seemed to us, poor timid creatures that we were, we passed through another door, and found our-

selves in a pillared place that looked not unlike cloisters, and at length we made it out to be vaults under the Friar's Keep."

"What a strange thing!" exclaimed Mary Ursula, speaking into the ear-trumpet she had recently made the good Sister a present of.

"Not so strange when you remember what the place was originally," dissented Sister Mildred. "Tradition says, you know, that these old religious buildings abounded in secret passages. I did not speak of the discovery, and enjoined silence on Mary; the Sisters might have been uncomfortable; and it was not advisable to let the public know there was a secret passage into our abode."

"Did you never enter it again?"

"Yes, once. Mary *would* go; and of course I could not let her go alone. It was not long before the illness came on that terminated in her death. Ah, my dear, we were young then, and such an expedition bore for us a sort of excitement and romance."

Mary Ursula sat in thought. "It strikes me as being anything but a pleasant idea," she said—"the knowledge that we may be invaded at any hour by any ill-disposed or curious straggler, who chooses to frequent the Friar's Keep."

"Not at all, my dear," said Sister Mildred, briskly. "Don't fear. We can go to the Keep at will, but the Keep cannot come to us. The two doors are firmly locked, and I hold the keys."

"I should like to see this passage!" exclaimed Mary Ursula. "Are you—dear Sister Mildred, do you think you are well enough to show it to me?"

"I'll make myself well enough," returned the good-natured lady: "and I think I am really so. My dear, I have always meant from the time you joined us to tell you of this secret passage: and for two reasons. The one because the Head of our Community ought not to be in ignorance that such a place exists; the other because your cousin recently disappeared so accountably in the Keep—though I suppose the passage could have nothing to do with that. But for my illness, I should have spoken before. We will go to-night, if you like."

Mary Ursula embraced the proposal on the spot. Attiring themselves in their warmest grey cloaks, the hoods well muffled

about their heads, for Sister Mildred said the passage would strike cold as an ice-house, they descended to the vaults below; the elder lady carrying the keys and Mary Ursula the lighted horn lantern, which could be made light or dark at will.

"Here's the door," whispered Sister Mildred, advancing to an obscure corner. "No one would ever find it; unless they had a special talent for exploring as my poor Mary had. Do you see this little nail in the wall? Well, the keys were hanging up there: and it was in consequence of the keys catching her eye that Mary looked for the door."

It required the efforts of both ladies to turn the key in the rusty lock. As the small Gothic door was pushed open, a rush of cold damp air blew on their faces. The passage was scarcely wide enough to admit two side by side without brushing the walls. The ladies held one another; Mary Ursula keeping a little in advance, her hand holding up the lantern to guide their steps.

A very long passage: no turnings or outlets, as Sister Mildred had described; nothing but the damp stone walls on either hand or overhead. While Mary Ursula was wondering whether they were going on for ever, the glimmer of the lantern suddenly played on a Gothic door in front, of the same size and shape as the one they had passed through.

"This is the other door, and this is the key," whispered Sister Mildred.

They put it into the lock. It turned with some difficulty and a grating sound, and the door slowly opened towards them. Another moment, and they had passed into the vaults beneath the Friar's Keep.

Very damp and cold and mouldy. As far as Mary Ursula could judge, in the dim light thrown out by the small lantern, they appeared to resemble the cloisters above: the same massive upright pillars supporting arches, the same damp stone flooring. There was no outlet to be seen in any part; no staircase upwards or downwards. Mary Ursula carried her lantern and waved it about but could find none: nothing beyond the door they had come through.

"Is there any other outlet to this place than the passage?" she asked of Sister Mildred.

"Very, my dear; very damp indeed," was the Sister's answer.

"I think we had better not stay; I am shivering with the cold air; and there's nothing, as you perceive, to be seen."

The ear-trumpet had been left behind, and Mary Ursula did not dare raise her voice. She was inwardly shivering herself; not with the chilly air, but with her own involuntary thoughts. Thoughts that she would willingly have put from her, but could not. With these secret vaults under the Keep, what facilities existed for dealing treacherously with Anthony Castlemaine; how easily he might be put out of sight for ever!

"Can he still be here, alive or dead?" she murmured to herself. "Surely not alive: for——"

A sound close at hand. It was on the opposite side of the vault, and was like the striking of metal against the wall. Instinctively Mary Ursula hid the lantern under her cloak, caught hold of Sister Mildred, and crouched down with her behind the remotest pillar. The deaf Sister had heard nothing; but she comprehended that there was some cause for alarm.

"Oh, my dear, what will become of us!" she breathed. "Whatever is it?"

Mary dared not speak. It was pitch-dark. A darkness that might almost be felt. In the midst of their painful suspense, not knowing what to fear, there arose a distant glimmering of light in the direction in which Mary had heard the sound. A minute afterwards some indistinct, shadowy form appeared, dressed in a monk's habit and cowl. It was the apparition of the Grey Friar.

A low, unearthly moan broke from Sister Mildred. Mary Ursula, herself faint with terror, as must be confessed, but keenly alive to the necessity for silence, pressed the Sister's lips, and strove to reassure her by clasping her waist with the other hand. The figure, holding its lamp before it, glided swiftly across the vault amidst the pillars, and vanished.

It all seemed to pass in a single moment. The unfortunate ladies—"distilled almost to jelly with the effect of fear," as Horatio says—cowered together, not knowing what was next to happen to them, or what other sight might appear.

Nothing more came; neither sight nor sound. The vaulted cloisters remained silent and dark. Presently Mary Ursula

ventured to show her light cautiously to guide their footsteps to the door, towards which she supported Sister Mildred: who once in the passage and the door locked behind her, gave way to her terror. The light of the lantern, thrown on her face, showed it to be as damp as the walls about her, and white as death. Thus they trod the passage back to their own domains, Sister Mildred requiring substantial help.

"Take the keys," she said to Mary Ursula, when they were once more in the warm, lighted parlour. "They belong to your custody of right now; and I'm sure a saint from heaven would never induce me to use them again. To think that dreadful ghost should appear to us."

"But, dear Sister Mildred—it was very terrifying, I admit; but it could not have been supernatural. There cannot be such things as ghosts."

"My child, we saw it," was the convincing answer. "Perhaps if they were to get a parson into the place and let him say some prayers, the poor wandering spirit might be laid to rest."

That there was something strangely unaccountable connected with the Friar's Keep, some mystery attaching to it, Mary Ursula felt assured. She carried the keys to her chamber, and locked them up. Her room adjoined Sister Mildred's; and she stood for some time looking out upon the sea. Partly to recover her equanimity; which had been considerably shaken during the expedition; partly to indulge her thoughts and fancies. An idea that Anthony Castlemaine might possibly be still alive, a prisoner in some of these vaults under the Keep, had dawned upon her. That there were other and more secret vaults besides these they had seen, was more than probable: vaults in which men might be secretly confined for a lifetime—ay, and no doubt had been so in the old days; confined until claimed by death. She did not think it likely that Anthony was alive: the conviction, that he was dead, had lain upon her from the first; it was upon her still: but the other idea had crept in and was making itself sufficiently heard to render her uncomfortable.

Her chamber was rather a nice one and much larger than Sister Mildred's. Certain articles suggestive of comfort, that had belonged to her room at Stilborough, had been placed in it: a light sofa and table; a pretty stand for books; a handsome

reading-lamp; a small cabinet, within which were deposited some cherished ornaments and mementoes that it would have given her pain to part with. If Miss Castlemaine had renounced the world, she had not renounced some of its little vanities and refinements: neither did the Community she had joined exact anything of the kind. The window, with its lovely sea-view, was curtained and draped, no less for warmth than for appearance. The room was, in fact, a sitting-room and bedroom combined. And there, at this window, stood Mary Ursula, shivering almost as much as she had shivered in the cloisters, and full of painful thoughts.

In the course of the following morning, she was sitting with sick Sister Margaret, when word came to her that a gentleman had called. Proceeding to the reception-parlour, she found there the faithful old friend and clerk, Thomas Hill. He was much altered: the unhappy death of his master and the anxiety connected with the bank affairs had told upon him; perhaps also the cessation of the daily routine of business was working its almost inevitable effect: at least, when Mary Ursula affectionately asked what it was that ailed him, he answered, "Weariness, induced by having nothing to do." The tears rushed to his eyes when he inquired whether her life satisfied her, whether she was not already sick to death of it, whether repentance for the step had yet set in. And Mary assured him that the contrary was the fact; she was growing to like the seclusion better day by day.

"Can you have comforts here, my dear Miss Mary?" he inquired, not at all satisfied.

"Oh yes, any that I please," she replied. "You should see my own room, dear Mr. Hill: it is almost as luxurious and quite as comfortable as my chamber was at home."

"Do they allow you a fire?"

She laughed; partly at the thought, partly to reassure him. "Of course they would if I wished for it; but the weather is becoming warm now. Sister Mildred has had a fire in her room all the winter. I am head of all, you know, and can order what I please."

"And you won't forget, Miss Mary, that all I have is yours," he returned in low, eager tones, taking a book out of his pocket. "Draw upon it when you like: be sure to consider your

comforts. I should like to leave you this cheque-book: I have brought it over with some blank cheques signed——"

She stopped him with hasty, earnest words of thanks. Assuring him that her income was sufficient, and more than sufficient, for everything she could possibly want, whether individually or for her share in the expenses of the Community. Thomas Hill, disappointed, returned the cheque-book to his pocket again.

"I wish to ask you one question," she resumed, after a pause, and in tones as low as his own. "Can you tell me how the estate of Greylands' Rest was left by my grandfather?"

"No, I cannot, Miss Mary; I have never known. Your father did not know."

"My father did not know?" she said, in some surprise.

"He never knew. The very last day of his life, when he was just as ill as he could be, he spoke of it when giving me a message for his nephew, the young man Anthony, Mr. Basil's son. He said that he had never cared to inquire into the particulars, and believed that it legally became James's; he felt sure that had it been left to Basil, James would not have retained possession of it. Miss Mary, I think the same."

"And—what is your opinion as to what became of Anthony?" she continued, after a short pause.

"I think, my dear, that young Mr. Anthony must somehow have rolled down the cliff and fallen into the sea. He wouldn't be the first man, poor fellow, by a good many, who has met with death through taking an uncertain step in the moonlight.

Mary Ursula said no more. This was only conjecture, just as all the rest of it had been.

When the visit was over, she put on her bonnet to stroll out with him. He had walked from Stilborough, intending to dine at the Dolphin, and return at his leisure. Mary went with him to the beach, and they parted at the door of the inn.

"You are quite certain you are tolerably happy, my dear?" he urged, as though needing to be assured of it again and again, holding both her hands in his. "Ah, it is all very well for you to say so; but I cannot reconcile myself to the change. I wish you had found your happiness in a different life."

She knew what he meant—found it as William Blake-Gordon's wife—and something like a faintness stole over her.

"Circumstances were against it," she meekly breathed. "I am content to believe that the life I have embraced is the best for me; the one appointed by God."

How little did she think that almost the next moment she should encounter her whilom lover! Disinclined to return at once to the Nunnery, and knowing that there was yet a little time before dinner, she continued her way up the secluded road towards the church. When close to the sacred edifice, a lady and gentleman approached on horseback, having apparently ridden from Stilborough. She recognized them too late to retreat: it was William Blake-Gordon and Miss Mountsorrel.

Miss Mountsorrel checked her horse impulsively; he could only do the same. The young lady spoke.

"Mary! is it you? How strange that we should meet! I thought you never came beyond the convent walls."

"Did you? I go out where and when I please. Are you well, Agatha?"

"Are *you* well?—that is the chief question," returned Miss Mountsorrel, a great deal of concern and sympathy in her tones. "You do not look so."

Just then Mary undoubtedly did not. Emotion had turned her pale as death. Happening to catch sight of Mr. Blake-Gordon, she saw that his face was, if possible, whiter than her own. A strangely imploring look went out to her from his eyes—but what it meant, she knew not.

"I shall come and see you some day, Mary, if I may," said Miss Mountsorrel.

"Certainly you may."

They prepared to ride on: Mr. Blake-Gordon's horse was restive. The young ladies wished each other good-morning: he bowed and lifted his hat. He had not spoken a word to her, or she to him. They had simply been face to face, he on horseback, she on foot, the emotion welling up from their hearts only too visible.

Mary opened the churchyard gate, went in, and sat down under a remote tree near the tomb of the Castlemaines. She felt sick and faint; and trembled as the young green leaves about her vibrated in the gentle wind. So this was the manner of their meeting again; and he was riding by the side of another!

The sound of horses, passing by, caused her to raise her head and glance towards the road again. Young Mountsorrel was riding swiftly to catch his sister, having apparently lingered behind: and the groom closely followed him at a sharp trot.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AT THE TURK'S HEAD.

It was August weather, and some few months had elapsed since the time of the last chapter. Stilborough lay hot and dusty under the summer sun: the pavements shone white and glistening, the roads were parched. In front of the Turk's Head on the sunny side of Cross Street, a thick layer of straw deadened the sound of horses and vehicles. A gentleman, driving into the town a few days ago, was taken ill there, and lay dangerously ill at the hotel: his doctor expressed it as "between life and death." It was Squire Dobie, of Dobie Hall.

The Turk's Head was one of those good old-fashioned, quiet inns, not much frequented by the general public, especially the commercial element. Its custom was chiefly confined to the county families, and to the class of people called gentlefolk. It was, therefore, rarely in a bustle, showing little signs of life excepting on Thursdays, market-day, and it would sometimes be so empty for days together that Stilborough might well wonder how Will Heyton, its many years' landlord, contrived to meet his expenses. But Will Heyton had, in point of fact, made a very nice nest-egg at it, and cared little now whether the inn was empty or full.

In the coffee-room, this hot August morning, at a small table by the right-hand window, sat a gentleman at breakfast. A tall, slender, well-dressed young man in slight mourning, of perhaps some six-and-twenty years. He was good-looking; with a fair, attractive face, blue eyes, and light wavy hair that took a tinge of gold in the sunlight. This gentleman had arrived at Stilborough the previous evening by a cross-country coach, had inquired for the best hotel, and been directed to the Turk's Head. It was late for breakfast, nearly eleven o'clock: and

when the gentleman—whose name was inscribed in the visitors' list as Mr. George North—came down, he had said something in a particularly winning way about the excellence of the bed having caused him to oversleep himself. With this one exception, the coffee-room was void of guests.

"Is this a large town?" he inquired of the portly head-waiter, who was partly attending on him, partly rubbing up the glasses and decanters that were ranged on the mahogany stand by the wall.

"Pretty well, sir. It's next to the chief county town, and is quite as much frequented."

"What are the names of the places near to it?"

"We have no places of note near to us, sir: only a few small villages that count for nothing."

"Well, what are their names?"

"There's Hamley, sir; and Eastwick; and Greylands——"

"Are any of these places on the sea?" interrupted the stranger, as he helped himself to a mutton chop.

"Greylands is, sir. It's a poor little place in itself, nothing hardly but fishermen's huts; but the sea is beautiful there. Bangalore sauce, sir?"

"Well, I don't know," said the young man, looking first at the sauce, and then at the waiter, a doubt in his laughing blue eyes. "Is it good?"

"Very good indeed, sir, as sauce; and rare too; you'd not find it in any other inn at Stilborough. Not but what some tastes prefer their chops unseasoned."

"I think I do," said the stranger, declining the sauce. "Thank you; it may be better to let well alone."

Breakfast over, Mr. George North sat back in his chair and glanced through the sunbeams at the dusty road and the white pavement. The waiter placed on the table the last number of the *Stilborough Herald;* and almost at the same moment a phaeton and pair dashed up to the inn door. The gentleman who was driving handed the reins to the groom sitting beside him, alighted, and entered the hotel.

The sun, shining right in Mr. George North's eyes, had somewhat obscured his outward view; but as the gentleman came into the coffee-room, he saw before him a tall stately man with a remarkably handsome face. Whilst gazing at the face, a slight

emotion suddenly came into his own. "What a likeness!" he murmured. "Can it be one of them?"

"How is Squire Dobie, Hobbs?" demanded Mr. Castlemaine of the old waiter—for the new-comer was the Master of Greylands. "Any better to-day?"

"Yes, sir; the doctor thinks there's a slight improvement. He has had a fairly good night."

"That's well. Is Mr. Atherly expected in to-day, do you know?"

"No, I don't, sir. Perhaps master knows. I'll inquire."

Whilst the servant went on this errand, Mr. Castlemaine strolled to the unoccupied window, and looked out on his waiting horses. Fine animals, somewhat restive this morning, and the pride of Mr. Castlemaine's stables. He glanced at the stranger, sitting at the breakfast-table, and was taken at once with his bright face and looks. Mr. George North was then reading the newspaper. Hobbs did not return, and Mr. Castlemaine seemed to grow impatient. A sudden thought struck the young man: he rose, and held out the newspaper.

"I beg your pardon, sir; I am, perhaps, keeping this from you."

"Not at all, thank you," said Mr. Castlemaine.

"I am a stranger; therefore this local news cannot interest me," continued Mr. George North, fancying courtesy alone might have prompted the refusal. "It is of no moment whether I read the gazette or not."

"I have already seen it: I am obliged to you all the same," replied Mr. Castlemaine, in his pleasantest manner, without a shade of distance about it. "Are you staying here?"

"At present I am. It may be that I shall remain only a short time. I cannot say yet. We artists travel about from village to village, from country to country, finding subjects for our pencil. I have lately been in the Channel Islands."

"Master says he is not particularly expecting Mr. Atherly to-day, sir," interposed Hobbs, returning; "but he thinks it likely he may be coming in. He will get here about one o'clock if he does come."

The Master of Greylands nodded in reply. "I suppose, Hobbs, Squire Dobie is not allowed to see any one?"

"Not yet, sir."

Mr. Castlemaine left the room, saluting the stranger at the breakfast-table. Hobbs followed, to attend him to the door.

"What's the name of the young man in the coffee-room?" he asked, standing for a moment on the steps. "He seems a nice young fellow."

"North, sir. Mr. George North. He came in last night by the Swallow coach."

"He says he is an artist."

"Oh, does he, sir!" returned the waiter, in accents of surprise and disappointment. "I'm sure I took him for a gentleman."

Mr. Castlemaine smiled at the words. Hobbs's ideas, he thought, were probably running on the artists who went about painting sign-boards.

"That accounts for his wanting to know the names of the parts about here," spoke the waiter. "He has been asking me. Them artists, sir, are rare ones for tramping about after bits of scenery."

The Master of Greylands went out to his carriage and took his seat. As he turned the horses' heads to go back the way they came, Mr. George North, looking on from within, caught sight for a moment of the back of the phaeton, with its conspicuous crest.

"The same crest!" he exclaimed, under his breath. "Then it must be one of them! I was almost sure of it. Shall I ask which of them it is?—no, better not. Suppose I go out and take a look at the town?" he continued, a few minutes later, waking up from a reverie.

Putting on a straw hat, which had a bit of black ribbon tied round it, he went strolling hither and thither. It was not market-day: few people were about, and the streets looked almost deserted. People did not care to come out in the blazing sun. Altogether, there was not much to be seen. Before an inn-door stood a sort of small yellow van, or omnibus —it was in fact something between the two—which was being freighted. It made its journeys three times a-week.

For want of something better to do, Mr. George North stood watching the horses put-to. On the sides of the van were inscribed the names of the places it called at; amongst them was Greylands. His eyes rested on the name and a sudden

thought arose to him. "Suppose I go over to Greylands by this yellow omnibus!"

"Do you call at all these places to-day?" he asked of a man, who was evidently the driver.

"At every one, sir. And come back through 'em again to-morrow."

"Have I time to go as far as the Turk's Head and back before you start?"

"Plenty of time, sir. We are not particular to a few minutes either way."

Mr. George North proceeded to the Turk's Head; not in the somewhat lazy manner to which his movements seemed by nature inclined, but as fast as the warmth allowed him. He there told the head-waiter that he was going to make a little excursion into the country for the purpose of looking about him, and might not be back until evening, or even before the morrow.

"Inside or out, sir?" questioned the driver when he got back again.

"Oh, outside to-day. Can't I sit beside you?"

He was welcome, the driver said, the seat not being taken; and Mr. George North mounted and put up his umbrella, which he had brought with him as a protection from the sun. Two or three more passengers got up behind, and placed themselves with the luggage; and there were several inside.

The van sped along very fairly; and in a short time reached the first village. After descending a hill, the glorious sea suddenly came into view.

"What place do you call this?" asked the stranger.

"This is Greylands, sir."

"Greylands? I think I'll get down here. What a magnificent sea! How much do I pay you?"

"A shilling fare, sir. Anything you please for the driver. Thank you, sir; thank you," concluded the man, pocketing the eighteenpence given to him. "We shall stop in a minute, sir, at the Dolphin."

On this hot day, which really seemed too hot for work, Mrs. Bent was stealing a few moments' idleness on the bench outside her window. John had been sitting there all the morning. The landlady was making free comments, after her wont, upon

the doings, good, bad and indifferent, of her neighbours; John gave an answering remark now and again, but she did not seem to expect it.

Greylands was in much the same condition as when we parted from it last. Poor Miss Hallet had been ill for some weeks, possibly the result of the fright, and was quite unable to inspect personally the vagaries of Miss Jane: the Friar's Keep and its mysteries remained where they had been; Sister Mildred was ill again, and Mary Ursula had not plucked up courage to penetrate again into the secret passage. Squire Dobie, red-hot at first to unravel the mystery of the disappearance of Basil's son, had finally given up the inquiry as hopeless; neither had Madame Guise advanced one jot in her discoveries touching the suspected iniquity of the Master of Greylands.

"Here comes the two-horse van," remarked Mrs. Bent.

The two-horse van drew up before the bench, close to Mr. and Mrs. Bent. Its way did not lie on the ordinary coach-road, but straight on up the hill past the Nunnery. Whether it had parcels or passengers to deliver, or whether it had not, it always halted at the Dolphin, to "give the horses breathing-time," as the driver said: and himself a gossip with the landlord and landlady.

The gossip to-day was chiefly about the unusual heat, and a refractory van-wheel, which had persisted the previous day in losing its spokes. And the driver had mounted to his seat again, and the van was rattling off, before Mr. and Mrs. Bent remarked that the gentlemanly-looking man in the straw hat, who had got down, as they supposed, merely to stretch his legs, had not gone on with it.

He was standing with his back to them looking about him. At the pile of buildings rising on his left, the Grey Nunnery; at the cliff on the right, with its nestling houses; at the dark-blue sea, lying calm and lovely with its fishing-boats resting on its surface. A long, lingering look of admiration at the latter, and he turned round to Mr. and Mrs. Bent, standing near the bench now, and lifted his straw hat as he addressed them.

"I beg your pardon. This seems to be a very nice place. What a fine view of the sea!"

"It's a very nice place—for its size, sir," said John. "And you wouldn't get a better sea than that anywhere."

"The place is called Greylands, I am told."

"Yes, sir: Greylands."

"I am an artist," continued the stranger, in his pleasing, open manner, a manner that was quite fascinating both Mr. and Mrs. Bent. "I should fancy there must be bits of landscape about here well worth taking."

"And so there is, sir. Many of 'em."

"Will you give me lodging for a few hours?—allow me to call your inn my head-quarters, whilst I look about a little?" he continued, with a very winning smile.

"And glad to receive you, sir," put in Mrs. Bent, before her husband had time to reply. "Our house is open to all, and especially to one as pleasant-spoken as you, sir."

"By the way," he said, pausing as he stepped before them indoors, as though trying to recall something—"Greylands? Greylands? Yes, that must be the name. Do you chance to know if a French lady is living anywhere in this neighbourhood? A Madame Guise?"

"To be sure she is, sir. She is governess at Greylands' Rest. Within a stone's-throw—as may almost be said—of this house."

"Ah, indeed. I knew her and her husband, Monsieur Guise, in France. He was my very good friend. Dear me! how thirsty I am."

"Would you like to take anything, sir?"

"Yes; but not beer, or any strong drink. It is too hot for that. Have you any lemonade?"

John Bent had; and went to fetch it. The stranger sat down near the open window, and gazed across at the sea. Mrs. Bent was gazing at him; at his very good-looking face, so fair and bright, and at the wavy hair, light and fine as silken gold.

"Are you English, sir?" demanded free and curious Mrs. Bent.

"Why do you ask the question?" he returned, with a smile, as he threw on her the light of his laughing blue eyes.

"Well, sir—though I'm sure you look like an Englishman, there's a tone in your voice that sounds foreign to me."

"I am English," he replied: "but I have lived very much

abroad, in France and Italy and other countries: have roamed about from place to place. No doubt my accent has suffered. We can't be vagabonds, you see, madam, without betraying it."

Mrs. Bent shook her head at the epithet, which he spoke with a laugh: few persons, to judge by looks, were less of a vagabond than he. John came in with the lemonade sparkling in a glass.

"Ah, that's excellent," said the traveller, drinking it at a draught. "If your viands and wines generally are as good as that, Mr. Bent, your guests must be fortunate. I should like to call and see Madame Guise," he added, rising. "I suppose I may venture to do so?"

"Why not, sir?"

"Are the people she is with dragons?" he asked in his half-laughing and wholly fascinating way. "Will they eat me up, think you? Some families do not admit visitors to their governesses."

"You may call, and welcome, sir," said Mrs. Bent. "The family are of note hereabout, great gentlefolk—the Castlemaines. Madame Guise is made as comfortable there as if it were her own house and home."

"I'll venture then," said the stranger, taking up his hat and umbrella. "Perhaps you will be good enough to direct me."

John Bent took him to the front-door, and pointed out the way over the fields—which was far pleasanter and somewhat nearer than the road way: and Mr. North was soon at the gate of Greylands' Rest. Mrs. Castlemaine was seated under a shady tree, doing some wool work. He raised his hat and bowed as he passed, but continued his way to the door. Miles opened it and asked his pleasure.

"I am told that Madame Guise lives here. May I be permitted to see her?"

"Yes, sir," replied the man, admitting him to the hall. "What name?"

"Mr. George North. I have not my cards with me."

"Mr. George North!" repeated Mrs. Castlemaine to herself, for she had been sufficiently near to hear the conversation in the still summer day. "What a handsome young man! Quite a Saxon face. I wonder who he is!"

Miles conducted Mr. George North to the red room, where

Madame Guise was sitting with Ethel. "A gentleman to see you, ma'am," was his introduction: "Mr. George North."

"Mr. —— who!" cried madame, her manner hurried and startled.

"Mr. George North," repeated Miles; and ushered the gentleman in.

She turned her back to the door, striving for courage and calmness in the one brief moment of preparation that she might snatch. But that Ethel's attention was given to the stranger, she had not failed to see the agitation. Madame's pocket-handkerchief was clutched in her nervous hand.

"How do you do, Madame Guise?'"

She turned round then, meeting him in the middle of the room. Her face was white as death as she put out her hand to him. His own manner was unembarrassed, but his countenance at the moment looked strangely grave.

"Being in the neighbourhood I have ventured to call upon you, Madame Guise. I hope you have been well."

"Quite well, thank you," she said in low tones, pointing to a chair, and sitting down herself. "I am so much surprised to see you."

"No doubt you are. How is your little girl?"

"She is at school with some good ladies, and is quite happy there," replied Madame Guise, speaking rather more freely. "I thought you were in Italy, Mr. North."

"I left Italy some week ago. Since then I have been wandering from place to place, sketching in my usual rather vagabond fashion, and have at length turned up in England."

The laughing light was coming back to his eyes: he momentarily turned them on Ethel as he spoke. Madame Guise seemed to consider she might be under an obligation to introduce him.

"Mr. George North, my dear. Miss Ethel Reene, sir; one of my pupils."

Mr. George North rose from his chair and bowed elaborately: Ethel bowed slightly, smiled and blushed. She was very much taken with the young man: and perhaps, if the truth were known, he was equally taken with her. Certain it was, that she was looking very pretty in her summer dress of white muslin, with the silver-grey ribbons in her hair.

"Did you come straight to England from Italy?" asked Madame Guise.

"My coming was not straight but very crooked," he answered. "I took the Channel Islands in my way."

"The Channel Islands!"

"Jersey and Guernsey, and Sark. Though I am not quite sure how I got there," he added in his very charming manner, and with another glance and half-smile at Ethel; who blushed again as she met it, and for no earthly reason.

"But you could not fly to them in your sleep," debated Madame Guise, taking his words more literally than he intended.

"I suppose not. I was at St. Malo one day, and I presume I must have gone over in a boat. One of these days, when my fortune's made, I intend to take up my abode for a few months at Sark. The climate is lovely; the scenery charming."

"How did you know I was here?" asked Madame Guise.

"I saw—I saw Madame de Rhone in France," he replied, making a slight pause. "She told me you had come to England and were living with an English family at a place called Greylands. Finding myself to-day at Greylands, I could but try to find you out."

"You are very good," murmured madame, whose hands were again beginning to show signs of agitation.

Ethel rose to leave the room. It occurred to her that madame might like to be alone with her friend, and she had remained long enough for politeness. At that same moment, however, Mrs. Castlemaine came in by the open glass-doors, so Ethel's considerate thought was foiled. Mrs. Castlemaine bowed slightly as she looked at the stranger.

"Mr. North, madam; a friend of my late husband's," spoke Madame Guise, quite unable to control her voice. "He was at Greylands to-day and has found me out."

"We are very pleased to see Mr. North," said Mrs. Castlemaine, turning in her most gracious tones, for the good looks and easy manners of the stranger had favourably impressed her. "Are you staying at Greylands?"

"I am travelling about, madam, from place to place, taking sketches. I have recently come from Hampshire; before that, I was in the Channel Islands. Last night I slept at

Stilborough, and came to Greylands this morning by a conveyance that I heard called the 'two-horse van' in search of objects for my pencil."

He mentioned the "two-horse van" so quaintly that Mrs. Castlemaine laughed. "I think you must have been very much jolted," she said, and Mr. North bowed.

"Remembering to have been told that Madame Guise, the wife of my late dear friend, Monsieur Guise, was residing with a family at a place called Greylands, I made inquiries for the address at the inn here, and presumed to call."

He bowed again slightly with somewhat of eprecation to Mrs. Castlemaine. She assured him he was quite welcome; it was no presumption.

"Are you an artist by profession, Mr. North? Or do you sketch for pleasure?" she asked presently, as the conversation proceeded.

"Somewhat of both, madam. I cannot say that I am dependent on my pencil. I once painted what my friends were pleased to call a good picture, and it was exhibited—and bought—in Paris."

"A water-colour?"

"Yes, a water-colour."

"I hope you received a good price for it."

"Five thousand francs."

"How much is that in English money?" asked Mrs. Castlemaine, after an electrified pause, for at the first moment her ideas had run to five thousand pounds.

"Two hundred pounds. It was a scene taken in the Alpes Maritimes."

"You have been much abroad, Mr. North?"

"Very much. I have latterly been staying for more than a year in Italy."

"How you must have enjoyed it?"

"During the sojourn I did so. But it will always lie on my mind with a heavy weight of repentance."

"But why?" exclaimed Mrs. Castlemaine.

"Because——" and there he paused. "In my thoughtlessness, madam, I, roving about from spot to spot, omitted sometimes to give my family any address where news might find me."

"And you had cause to repent not doing so?"

"Great cause," he answered, an intensely sad expression resting for an instant on his face. "My father died during that time; and—other matters wanted me. My life, so far as it concerns that portion of it, will be one of unavailing repentance."

It almost seemed—at least the fancy struck Ethel—that Mr. North gave this little bit of confidence—unusual in a stranger—for the benefit of Madame Guise. Certain it was, that he looked at her two or three times as he spoke; and on her face there shone a strangely sad and regretful light.

In about half-an-hour he rose to depart. Mrs. Castlemaine offered luncheon, but he declined it. He had been late and lazy that morning, he said laughingly, and it seemed but now that he had breakfasted at the Turk's Head. The impression he left behind him was not so much of a stranger, as of an acquaintance they had known, so pleasant and easy had been the intercourse during the interview; and an acquaintance they were sorry to part with.

Madame Guise went with him across the lawn. Mrs. Castlemaine would have gone also, but that Ethel stopped her. "Mamma, don't," she whispered: "they may be glad to have a few moments alone. I fancy Madame Guise cannot have seen him since before her husband died: she seemed quite agitated when he came in."

"True," said Mrs. Castlemaine, for once recognizing reason in words of Ethel's. "What a gentlemanly young fellow he seems—in spite of that straw hat."

He had put on the straw hat, and seemed to be looking at the flower-beds in his progress; Madame Guise pointing to one and another. Had Mrs. Castlemaine caught only a word of the conversation being carried on under the semblance of admiring the flowers, she might have stolen out to listen in gratification of her curiosity. Which would not have served her, for they spoke in French.

"How you startled me, George!" cried Madame Guise, as their heads were both bent over a rose-tree. "I thought I should have fainted. It might have discovered all. Let us walk on!"

"Well, I suppose I ought to have written first. But I

thought I should be introduced to you alone—your being here as governess."

"How are they all at Gap? Look at these carnations. How is Emma? Did you receive my letter through her?"

"I received it when I reached Gap. They are all well. She gave me your letter and what news she possessed. I cannot understand it, Charlotte. *Where* is Anthony?"

"Dead. Murdered. As I truly and fully believe."

Mr. North lifted his hat and passed his white handkerchief across his brow, very stern and perplexed just then.

"When can I see you alone, Charlotte?"

"This evening. As soon as twilight sets in, I will meet you in Chapel Lane:" and she directed him how to find it. "Stay at the lower end near that great building almost in ruins, the Friar's Keep, and I will come to you. Are you here at last to help me to unravel the treachery, George?"

"I will try to do it."

"But why have you been so tardy?—why did you go to—what did you say—those Channel Islands?"

"I had an artist friend with me who *would* go over there. I did not care to show too much eagerness to come to England—he might have suspected I had a motive. And it seems to me, Charlotte, that this investigation will be a most delicate business; one that a breath of suspicion might defeat."

"And oh, why did you linger so long in Italy, George?" she asked in low tones of extreme pain. "And to have neglected for months to send us an address that would find you! Had you been at Gap when the father died, the probability is that Anthony and you would have made the journey here together. Surely Mr. James Castlemaine had not dared to kill him then!"

"Hush!" he answered in a voice more sadly painful than her own. "You heard what I said just now in the room: the regret, the self-reproach will only cease with life. Until this evening then, Charlotte!"

"Until this evening."

"Who is that charming young lady?" he asked, as they shook hands in parting. "What relation is she to the house?"

"No real relation at all. She is Miss Reene; Mrs. Castle-

maine's step-daughter. Mrs. Castlemaine was a widow when she married into the family."

Mr. George North closed the gate behind him; took off his hat to madame with the peculiar action of a Frenchman, and walked away.

CHAPTER XXV.

MR. GEORGE NORTH.

If there existed one man more devoid of guile and less capable of deceit than his fellows, it was certainly George North. And yet he was acting a deceitful part now; inasmuch as he had made his appearance in England and introduced himself at Greylands' Rest, under what might be called a false name. "George North" had been given him in baptism: but his surname he had dropped. He was the son of Basil Castlemaine, and the younger brother of the most unfortunate Anthony.

Four children had been born to Basil Castlemaine and his wife. They were named as follow: Anthony, Mary Ursula, George North, and Emma. The elder daughter died young: the wife died just as her other children had grown up. Anthony married Charlotte Guise; Emma married Monsieur de Rhone, a gentleman who was now chief partner in the silk-mills with which Basil Castlemaine had been connected. The two young Castlemaines, Anthony and George, had both declined to engage in commerce. Their father pointed to them that a share in the silk-mills was open to each, and no doubt a fortune at the end of a few years' connection with the business; beyond that, he did not particularly urge the step on either of them. His sons would both inherit a modest competency under his will. Anthony would also succeed—as Basil fully believed—to his forefather's patrimony in England, Greylands' Rest, which would necessitate his residing there; and George, at the age of twenty-four, came into a fairly good fortune left to him by his uncle and godfather, Mr. North. Therefore, both were considered by the father as provided for, and if they preferred to decline commerce, they were welcome to do so. George had shown considerable talent for drawing and paint-

ing; it had been well cultivated; and though he did not intend to make it exactly his profession, for he was independent, he did hope to become famous as a water-colour painter. Some time after attaining the age of twenty-four, and taking possession of his bequest, he had resolved on making a lengthened sojourn in Italy; not to remain in one part of it, but to move about as inclination dictated. And this he did. From time to time he wrote home, saying where he then was; but rarely where he would be later, simply because he did not know himself. Two or three letters reached him in return, containing the information that all was well.

All being well seems to the young to mean that all will continue well; as it did to George Castlemaine: his mind was at rest, and for several months a silence ensued. It is true he wrote home; but, as to tidings from home reaching him in return, he afforded no chance for it. He crossed to Sicily, to Corsica; he went to the Ionian Isles: it is hard to say where he did not go. When tidings from home at length reached him, he found that his family, whom he had been picturing as unchanged and happy, was dispersed. His father was dead. Anthony had gone over to England to claim his patrimony; and, not returning as he ought to have done, his wife and child had followed him. Emma de Rhone, who conveyed all this in writing to her brother, confessed she did not understand what could have become of Anthony. George, judging others by himself possibly, thought that Anthony was safe, and would soon be heard of; his whole heart for the moment was absorbed in the grief for his father and in self-reproach for his own carelessness.

He did not hurry home: there was nothing to go for now: and it was summer weather when George once more re-entered Gap. To his intense astonishment, his concern, his perplexity, he found that Anthony was really lost: at least, that his wife seemed unable to discover him. Emma de Rhone handed him a letter of several sheets, which had come enclosed to her for him from Charlotte many weeks before, and had been waiting for him. When George Castlemaine broke the seal, he found it to contain a detailed account of Anthony's disappearance and the circumstances connected with it, together with her suspicions of James Castlemaine, and her residence in that gentleman's

house. In short, she told him all; and she begged him to come over and see into it for himself; but to come as a stranger, and not to declare himself to be connected with her, or as a Castlemaine. She also warned him not to tell Emma or Monsieur de Rhone of her worst fears about Anthony, lest they should undertake the investigation themselves: which might ruin all hope of discovery, for Mr. Castlemaine was not one to be approached in that way. The result of this was that George Castlemaine was now here as George North. He had deemed it well to obey Charlotte's behest, and come over; at the same time he did not place very much faith in the tale. It puzzled him extremely: and he could but recall that his brother's wife was given to being a little fanciful—romantic, in short.

Not a breath of air was stirring. The summer night seemed almost as hot as the day had been. A mist lay on the fields beyond the hedge on either side Chapel Lane as Charlotte Guise hastened lightly down it. In her impatience, she had come out full early to keep the appointment, and when she reached the end of the lane, George North—as for convenience' sake we must continue to call him—was only then approaching it.

"You found it readily, George?" she whispered.

"Quite so. It is in a straight line from the inn."

"Are you going back to Stilborough to-night?"

"No. I shall sleep at the Dolphin, and go back to-morrow."

He offered his sister-in-law his arm. She took it; but the next moment relinquished it again. "It may be better not," she said. "We are not very likely to meet people, but it is not impossible: and, to see me walking familiarly with a stranger would excite comment."

They turned up the hill. It was safer than Chapel Lane, as Charlotte observed; for there was no knowing but Mr. Harry Castlemaine might be going through the lane to the Commodore's, whose company both father and son seemed to favour. Mr. Castlemaine was at Stilborough: had driven over in the morning, and was no doubt staying there to dine.

"This seems a lonely road," remarked Mr. North, as they went on side by side.

"It is very lonely. We rarely meet any one but the preventive-men: and not often even one of them."

Almost in silence they continued their way until opposite the coastguard-station: a short line of white dwellings lying at right angles with the road on the left hand. Turning off to the right, across the waste land on the other side the road, they soon were on the edge of the cliff, the sea lying below.

"We may walk and talk here in safety," said Charlotte. "There is never more than one man on duty: his beat is a long one, all down there"—pointing to the line of coast in the opposite direction to Greylands—"and we shall see him, should he approach, long before he could reach us. Besides, they are harmless and unsuspicious, these coastguardsmen; they only look out for ships and smugglers."

"We do not get a very good view of the sea from here: that high cliff on the right stands in the way," remarked Mr. North. "What a height it is! But now, Charlotte, about this most unhappy business?" he continued, as they began to pace backwards and forwards. "Where are we to look for Anthony? It cannot be that he is *lost*."

"But he is lost, George. He went into the Friar's Keep that unhappy February night, and he was never seen to come out again. He never did come out again, as most people here believe; I, for one. What other word is there for it but lost?'"

"It sounds like a fable," said George North. "Like a tale out of those romance books you used to read, Charlotte."

"I thought so when I first came here and heard it."

"Did that account you sent me contain all the details?"

"I think so. One cannot give quite so elaborate a history in writing as verbally. Small particulars are apt to drop out."

"You had better go over it now, Charlotte: all you know from the beginning. Omit not the smallest detail."

Madame Guise obeyed at once. To her it was something like the relief afforded to a parched traveller in an African desert, when he comes upon the well of water he has been fainting for, and slakes his thirst. Not to one single human being had Charlotte Guise been able to pour forth this strange story all through these months: the need to do so, the pain, the yearning for sympathy and counsel, had been consuming her the whole time as an inward fever.

She told all. She entered into every detail, and George North listened to the end without interruption.

"And it is supposed that the cry, following on the shot that was almost immediately heard, came from my poor brother?" were the first words with which he broke the silence.

"I feel *sure* it was his cry, George."

"And Mr. James Castlemaine denies that he was there?"

"He denies it entirely. He says he was at home at the time and in bed."

"Suppose that it was Anthony who cried out; that he was killed by the shot: would it be easy to put him out of sight into the sea?"

"Not from the Keep. They say there is no opening to the sea. Mr. Castlemaine may have dragged him across the chapel ruins and thrown him over from there."

"But could he have done that without being seen? John Bent, you say, was outside the gates, waiting for Anthony."

"But John Bent was not there the whole time. When he grew tired of waiting he went home, thinking Anthony might have come out without his seeing him—but not in his heart believing it possible. Finding Anthony had not returned to the inn, John Bent went again and searched the Keep with Mr. Nettleby, the superintendent of these coastguardsmen."

"And they did not find any trace of him?"

"Not any."

"Or of any struggle, or other ill work?"

"I believe not. Oh, it is most strange!"

"Who locked the gate—as you describe: and then opened it again?" questioned Mr. North after a moment's pause.

"Ah, I know not. No one can conjecture."

"Have you searched this Keep yourself?"

"Oh, George, I have not dared to do so! It has a ghost."

"A *what!*" exclaimed Mr. North.

"A ghost. I have seen it, and was nearly frightened to death by it."

"Charlotte!"

"I know you strong men ridicule such things," said poor Madame Guise, meekly. "Anthony would have laughed just as you do. It is true, though. The Friar's Keep is haunted by a dead monk: he appears dressed in his cowl and grey habit, the same that he wore in life. He passes the window sometimes with a lamp in his hand."

"Since when has this ghost taken to appearing?" inquired George North, after a short period of reflection. "Since Anthony's disappearance?"

"Oh, for a long, long time before it. I believe the monk died something like two hundred years ago. Why? Were you thinking, George, that it might be the ghost of poor Anthony?"

Mr. George North drew in his lips. At a moment like the present he would not increase her pain by showing his disbelief in ghosts.

"What I was thinking was this, Charlotte. Whether, if poor Anthony be really no more, his destroyers may have reason to wish the Friar's Keep to remain unexplored, lest traces of him might be found, and so have improvised a ghost, as you call it, to scare people away."

"The ghost has haunted the place for years and years, George. It has been often seen."

"Then that puts an end to my theory."

"I might have had courage to search the Keep by day, but I have not dared to run the risk," resumed Madame Guise. "Were I to be seen going into the Friar's Keep, a place that every one shuns, it might be suspected that I had a motive for doing so, and Mr. Castlemaine would question me. Besides, my young pupil is usually with me by day: it is only in the evening that I have absolute liberty."

"I wonder you reconciled yourself to entering the house as governess, Charlotte."

"For Anthony's sake," she said imploringly. "What would I not do for his sake? And then, you see, George, while Anthony does not come forward to give orders at Gap, and there is no proof that he is dead, I cannot draw money. My own income is small."

"Why, my dear Charlotte, what are you talking about? You could have had any amount of money you pleased from me——"

"You forget, George: you were travelling, and could not be written to."

"Well, there was Emma," returned Mr. George, half confounded by his own negligence.

"I did not want to give too much confidence to Emma and

her husband: I have told you why. And I would have gone into Mr. Castlemaine's house, George, the opportunity offering, though I had been the richest woman in the world. But for being there, I should not have known that Mr. Castlemaine has secret possession of Anthony's ring. *You* remember that ring, George."

"I remember I used jokingly to say I would steal it from him—it was so beautiful. The possession of the ring is the most damaging proof of all against my uncle James. And yet not a certain proof."

"Not a certain proof!"

"No: for it is possible that he may have picked it up in the Friar's Keep."

"Then why not have shown the ring? An innocent man would have done so at once, and—— There comes the preventive-man," broke off Madame Guise, her quick sight detecting the officer at some distance. "Let us go down the hill again, George."

They crossed the waste land to the road, and went towards the hill. George North was lost in thought.

"There is something almost incomprehensible about it," he said aloud: "and for my own part, Charlotte, I must confess that I cannot yet believe the uncle James to be guilty. The Castlemaines are recognized in their own land here as men of strict honour. I have heard my father say so many a time. And this is so dreadful a crime to suspect any one of! I think I saw my uncle to-day."

"Where?" she asked. And Mr. North explained. "Oh, yes, that was Mr. Castlemaine," she said, recognizing him by the description.

"Well, he does not look like a man who would do a dreadful deed, Charlotte. He has a very attractive face: and I think a good face. Shall I tell you why I have more particularly faith in his innocence? Because he is so like my father."

"And I have never doubted his guilt. You must admit, George, that appearances are strongly against him."

"Undoubtedly they are. And a sad thing it is to have to say it of one of the family. Do you see much of the younger brother—the uncle Peter?"

"But he is dead," returned Charlotte.

"The uncle Peter dead!"

"He died the very night that Anthony was lost: the mourning you saw Mrs. Castlemaine wearing was for him; Ethel and the little girl have gone into slighter mourning."

And Madame Guise proceeded to give a brief history of Mr. Peter Castlemaine's death and the circumstances surrounding it, with the entrance of Mary Ursula to the Grey Nunnery. He listened in silence.

"This is the Friar's Keep," she said, as they came to it, and her voice instinctively fell to a whisper. "Do you see those two middle windows? It is there that people see the ghost of the Grey Monk."

"I wish he would show himself now!" heartily spoke Mr. North, throwing his eyes on the windows. At which wish his sister-in-law drew closer to him.

"Here's the gate," she said, halting as they came to it. "Was it not *strange*, George, that it should be locked that night?"

"If it really was locked; and is never locked at other times," replied George North, who quite seemed to be going in for some of the scepticism of his uncle, the Master of Greylands. Opening the gate, he walked in. Charlotte followed. They looked inside the Gothic doorway to the dark silent cloisters of the Keep; they stood for some moments gazing at the sea: but Charlotte did not care to linger there with him, lest they should be seen.

"And it was to these ruins that Anthony came, and passed into those unearthly-looking cloisters!" he exclaimed, as they were going out. "That dark, still interior put me in mind of nothing so much as a mortuary."

Charlotte shivered. "It is there," she said, "that we must search for traces of Anthony——"

"I suppose there is a staircase, or something of the sort leading to the upper rooms of the Keep?" he interrupted.

"Oh yes: a stone staircase."

"Have you been up to the rooms?"

"I!" she exclaimed, as if the question were unnecessary. "Why, it is in those upper rooms that the ghost is seen. They are partly in ruins. Mr. Castlemaine and some men of the law he called to his aid from Stilborough went over it all after

Anthony's loss, and found no traces of him. But I think that a search conducted by Mr. Castlemaine would not be a true one: the Master of Greylands' will is law in the place: he is bowed down to like a king. How shall you manage to account for taking up your abode at Greylands, so that no suspicion may attach to you?"

"I shall be here for the purpose of sketching. An obscure artist excites neither notice nor suspicion, Charlotte," he added in half-laughing tones. "By the way—there's no danger, I hope, that little Marie Ursule will remember Uncle George?"

"Not the least. You left her too long ago for that. But, take notice, George, that here she is only Marie. It would not do to let her other name, Ursule, slip out."

"I will take care," replied George North.

"I think you will. I think you have altered, George. You are more thoughtful, more sober in manner than you used to be."

"Ay," he answered. "That carelessness and its sad fruits altered me, Charlotte. It gave me a lesson that will last me for life."

They were opposite the entrance of the Grey Nunnery: and, in the self-same moment, its doors opened and Ethel Reene came forth, attended by Sister Ann. The sight seemed to startle Madame Guise.

"Dear me!—but it is I who am careless to-night," she said, under her breath. "Talking with you, George, has made me forget even time."

In fact, madame was to have called at the Nunnery quite an hour ago for Ethel: who had been to spend the evening there with Miss Castlemaine. Madame went forward with her apologies: saying that she had met her husband's old friend, Mr. North, and had stayed talking to him of bygone days, forgetful of the passing moments.

"I will take charge of Miss Reene now, Sister Ann; I am so sorry you should have had to put your things on," she added.

"Nay, but I am not sorry," returned Sister Ann, candidly. "It is pleasant to us to get the change of a walk. Your little one has been very happy this evening, Madame Guise; playing at bo-peep and eating the grapes Miss Reene brought her."

Sister Ann retired indoors. Madame Guise and Ethel went

the front way round by the Dolphin to Greylands' Rest, Mr. George North attending them. The shortest way was across the field; and, though it involved a stile, madame took it. Mr. North talked to Ethel, and made himself very agreeable—as none could do better than he. The conversation was carried on in French, madame having unconsciously resumed that language with Mr. North when they left Sister Ann.

"There are many delightful bits of scenery in this little place," said Mr. North: "I have been looking about this afternoon. Perhaps I may bring myself and my pencils here for a short sojourn: I should much like to take some sketches."

"Yes, they are very lovely views," said Ethel. She was walking arm-in-arm with the governess, and Mr. North strolled along at Ethel's elbow.

"How well you speak French!" he exclaimed. "Almost as well as we French people ourselves. You have only a very slight accent."

"But I thought you were English," remarked Ethel.

"Well, so I am. But when you have long sojourned in a country, you seem to identify yourself with its inhabitants—and, in consequence, with their nationality."

"And you have been long in France?"

"Yes."

They had reached the stile now. Mr. North jumped over it and assisted Madame Guise. Ethel mounted instantly, and was springing down alone: but he turned and caught her. In the hurry, she tripped, and somewhat bent her hat against his shoulder. He made fifty apologies, just as though it had been his fault; and there was much laughing. Mr. North quite forgot to release her hand until they had gone on some paces; and Ethel felt thankful that, in the summer night, her blushes were unseen.

At the entrance-gate, where he had taken leave of Madame Guise in the morning, he took leave of them now; shaking madame's hand, and asking whether he might be permitted to shake Ethel's, as it was the custom in England. Ethel's private conviction was that the world had never contained so attractive an individual as Mr. George North.

Mr. George North had all but regained the door of the Dolphin, where he had dined and would lodge for the night,

when a carriage and pair turned the corner at a quick pace, the groom driving. George North, drawing aside as it passed him, recognized the handsome phaeton he had seen in the morning at the Turk's Head. The Master of Greylands was returning from Stilborough.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LOVE'S AWAKENING.

It was yet early morning. The sky was a deep blue, the sea indolent and calm, the air intensely hot. Mr. George North, sitting on the bench outside the Dolphin Inn, his straw hat tilted over his brows, gazed at the placid sea before him, and felt as lazy as the atmosphere.

He had slept well, and breakfasted to his perfect content. Young, sanguine, healthy, the mystery encompassing his brother Anthony's fate had not disturbed his rest. The more than hinted doubts of Charlotte Guise—that Anthony had been sent out of the world by Mr. Castlemaine—failed to find any response in George North's mind. The mere supposition appeared to him far-fetched and impossible; the implied doubt of the Master of Greylands little less than a libel on the name of Castlemaine. Men of the world are inclined to be practical rather than imaginative in their views of things: and the young and hopeful look ever on the bright side of life.

That Anthony's disappearance was unaccountable, George North felt; his continued absence, if indeed he still lived, was yet more strange. There was very much to be unravelled in connection with that past February night, and George North intended to do his best to bring it to light: but that his brother had been destroyed in the dreadful manner implied, he could not believe. Without giving credit to anything so terrible, he felt that sufficient ground existed, ay and more than sufficient, for distrust and uncertainty. And, just as his sister-in-law had taken up her abode at Greylands under false colours, to devote herself to search out the mystery of the disappearance, so did George North resolve to take up his. Nothing loth was he to sojourn there. Had Anthony presented himself

before him at that moment, safe and sound, George would still have felt inclined to remain; for the charms of Ethel Reene had made anything but a transient impression on him. The world was his own, too; he had no special home in it; Greylands was as welcome an abode to him as any other resting-place.

John Bent came forth to join his guest. Landlords in those days were different folk from what they are in these, and their ways were different also. He wore no waistcoat under his loose linen coat, and his head was bare.

"A nice stretch of water, that, sir," he said respectfully, indicating the wide sea, shining out in the distance.

"It is indeed," replied George North. "I think the place very charming altogether. I feel inclined to bring over my pencils and take up my quarters with you for a bit, and sketch these places. What do you say to it, Mr. Bent?"

"There's nothing I could say, sir, but that it would give me and my wife pleasure if you did. We'd try and make you comfortable."

"Ay; I don't fear that. Well, I think I shall go over to Stilborough and bring my traps. I saw some charming bits of scenery yesterday when I went to call on the French lady, and quite long to sketch them."

"No doubt, sir," returned John Bent by way of answer. "But you'd have to ask leave of the Master of Greylands before making them. And that leave might not be easy to get."

"Why not?"

"They are on his land, sir."

"What of that? Surely he would not deny it! He could not be churlish enough to wish to keep these lovely spots entirely to himself?"

John Bent shook his head. "I don't think Mr. Castlemaine would do that, sir; he is not so selfish as that comes to; but he does not like to see strangers about the place. It's my belief he would keep all strange folk out of Greylands if he could."

"Why should he?"

"Just his pride and his exclusive temper, sir."

"But I thought I had heard Mr. Castlemaine described as a generous and pleasant man," remarked Mr. North.

"Well, and so he is, sir, when he chooses to be," confessed

the landlord; "I don't say to the contrary. In many things he is as easy and liberal as a man can be. But in regard to having strangers about his land, or in the place either, he is just a despot. And I think the chances are ten to one, sir, against your getting leave to sketch any spot of his."

"I can but ask. If he refuses me, well and good. Sufficient points will be left for me: such as that cliff, for example, and that glorious sea."

Mr. North rose as he spoke. At that same moment two of the Grey Ladies were crossing over from the Nunnery. Only one of them wore the dress of the community, Sister Margaret. The other was Miss Castlemaine, in her flowing mourning robes. Each of the ladies smiled kindly and gave the good-morrow to John Bent. George North lifted his straw hat and bowed with all the ceremony of his country.

Possibly the action, so uncharacteristic of most Englishmen, attracted the attention of Mary Ursula. Bending her head to acknowledge the courtesy, her eyes rested on the young man's face. Whether it was his action, whether anything she saw in the face struck her, certain it was that she half stopped to gaze at him. She said nothing, however, but passed on.

"What a magnificent young woman!" cried Mr. North, when the ladies were out of hearing. "She is beautiful. I mean the lady in mourning: not the Sister."

"She is that, sir. It is Miss Castlemaine."

"Miss Castlemaine! Which Miss Castlemaine?"

"The late banker's daughter, sir. Niece to the Master of Greylands."

An hour later, the ladies went by again on their way homeward. John was outside his door still, but alone, and Miss Castlemaine accosted him.

"Who was that gentleman we saw here just now, Mr. Bent?"

"His name's North, madam: he is an artist."

"Thank you," said Miss Castlemaine.

"Why did you inquire?" asked Sister Margaret, as they went on.

"Because something in the stranger's face seemed to be familiar to me—as though I had seen it before," replied Mary Ursula.

Meanwhile, Mr. George North, who seemed to do things

rather impulsively, had proceeded to Greylands' Rest to obtain permission for sketching particular bits of scenery which might be owned by Mr. Castlemaine. He was nearly at the end of his journey when he encountered Mr. Castlemaine, coming forth from his house with Ethel Reene. Mr. North lifted his hat, and approached them.

"I beg your pardon," he said to Mr. Castlemaine, bowing at the same time to Ethel; "I believe I have the honour of speaking to the Master of Greylands."

Mr. Castlemaine recognized him at once as the young traveller he had seen the previous day at the Turk's Head; the same who had just been talked about at his breakfast-table. This Mr. George North, it turned out, was a friend of Madame Guise's, or, as madame especially put it, of her late husband's. A *gentleman* artist, madame had said, for he was not dependent on his profession; he had a sufficient patrimony, and was of good family: and Mr. Castlemaine had accepted all unsuspiciously. He was, indeed, the least suspicious man in the world: and it no more occurred to him to connect this young man and his appearance at Greylands with that unhappy affair, than he had connected madame with it. Mr. Castlemaine had taken rather a fancy to this young artist at the Turk's Head: he liked his bright face now, as he came up to them: his open, attractive manners.

George North preferred his request. He had come to Greylands the previous day for the purpose of calling on Madame Guise; had been struck with the pretty place and its many charming bits of scenery. Some of these he found belonged to the Master of Greylands: would the Master of Greylands give him permission to sketch them?

And taken, it must be repeated, by the applicant's gentlemanly bearing, Mr. Castlemaine gave the permission at once, never pausing to count the cost of any suggestions that might afterwards arise against it. Artists had come to Greylands before; they had remained a week or two and departed again, leaving no traces behind them: it would no doubt be the case in the present instance. Mr. North was somewhat different from the others, though; inasmuch as he was known to Madame Guise (who vouched for his being a gentleman) and also that he had gained the liking of Mr. Castlemaine.

Mr. North warmly expressed his thanks for the readily-accorded permission. He turned to retrace his steps, and they all walked on together.

"You have been acquainted with Madame Guise and her family some time, I find," observed the Master of Greylands. "Knew them abroad."

"Oh yes. Her husband was a dear friend of mine. We were—" Mr. North hesitated, but brought the suggestive word out, as he had led up to it—"like brothers."

"Was there anything peculiar in his death?" asked Mr. Castlemaine. "Madame Guise seems to shrink so much from all mention of the subject that we can hardly help fancying so: and it is a topic upon which we cannot question her. He died suddenly, she said one day, when some allusion was made to him, and that is all we know. Mrs. Castlemaine observed that she shivered as she spoke."

"That is what I heard—that he died suddenly," assented Mr. North. "I was roaming about Italy at the time, and did not know of it for some months afterwards. Madame Guise had left for England then. I procured her address; and being so near, called to see her yesterday."

Mr. Castlemaine slightly nodded—as if this scarcely needed explanation. "Then you do not know what Monsieur Guise died of, Mr. North? She has not told you?"

"No, she has not. I do not know what he died of. They were very much attached to each other, and her avoidance of the subject may perhaps be natural. He was an estimable young man, and my very good and dear friend."

Thus talking, the fields were traversed and they gained the road. Here their routes lay in opposite directions: that of the Master of Greylands and Ethel to the right, Mr. North's to the left. He was returning to the Dolphin before starting on his walk to Stilborough.

"You are staying at the inn, I presume," observed Mr. Castlemaine.

"Yes, I am comfortable there, and the charges are very moderate. I called for my bill this morning."

"Called for your bill! Are you going away?"

"Only to come back again this afternoon. I left my portmanteau and pencils at Stilborough."

"Well, we shall be happy to welcome you at Greylands' Rest whenever you feel inclined to call on Madame Guise," spoke Mr. Castlemaine, in parting. "Will you dine with us this evening?"

"Thank you. With very much pleasure."

Mr. Castlemaine cordially shook hands, and turned away. It was rare indeed that the Master of Greylands condescended to be so free with a stranger—or, in fact, with any one. But his heart warmed to this young man; he knew not why: and there was something in Mr. North's bearing, though it was perfectly deferential to the Master of Greylands, which seemed to testify that he was, and knew himself to be, of the same social standing in society; at least that gentleman's equal.

But that the propensity we all have to take likes and dislikes seems to obey no rule or law, and is never to be accounted for, it might be noticed as a curious circumstance here. When Mr. Castlemaine first saw the unfortunate Anthony, he had taken a dislike to him. How far the avowed errand of that young man —his claiming Greylands' Rest—may have induced this, cannot be told: Mr. Castlemaine would have said that it had nothing to do with it; that he disliked him instinctively. Most people had seen nothing in Anthony but what was to be liked; ay, and much liked; Mr. Castlemaine was an exception. And yet, here was Anthony's brother (though Mr. Castlemaine knew it not) to whom his heart was going out as it had never before gone out to a stranger! Truly these instincts are more capricious than a woman's will!

George North ran into the Dolphin, caught up his umbrella, and started on his hot walk to Stilborough. In the course of the afternoon he was back again with what he was pleased to call his traps—a portmanteau and a sketching-case—having chartered a fly to Greylands. There was no van at his disposal that afternoon.

"Do you get much of this fiery weather?" he asked, throwing himself down near Mrs. Bent in her sitting-room, while the landlord saw to his luggage.

"Well, we have our share of it, sir, when it's a hot summer. And this is a very hot one. Even the sea yonder looks hot."

"I shall take a dip presently and try it," returned Mr.

North. "That must be the best of living at the sea-side: you get splendid baths."

"You have not told me what you'd like for dinner yet, sir," resumed Mrs. Bent, who was stripping currants into a pan, her face and the currants and the cap-ribbons all one and the same colour.

"Dinner! Why, I am going to dine at Greylands' Rest. Mr. Castlemaine asked me."

"*Did* he!" cried Mrs. Bent, in surprise. "Well, that's a great thing for him to do. He don't favour new-comers, sir."

"He has so far favoured me. Mrs. Bent," added the artist, a laughing look in his bright eyes, "what a pretty girl that is, up there!"

Mrs. Bent raised her own eyes from the currants, and shot forth an inquiring glance.

"Miss Ethel Reene! Well, so she is, sir, and as good as she is pretty. There's no love lost—as it is said—between her and her step-mother. At any rate, on Mrs. Castlemaine's part. The servants say Miss Ethel gets snubbed and put upon above a bit. She has to give way finely to the little one."

"Who is the little one?"

"Miss Flora, sir: Mrs. Castlemaine's daughter. A troublesome, ill-behaved little chit: always in mischief. The last time we were brewing; it's only a few days ago; my young lady was passing the door and ran in: she went rushing to the brewhouse, and fell backwards into the mash-tub. Fortunately the liquor had been drawn off; but there she was, squealing in the wet grains."

Mr. North laughed, and rose. He put on his hat and went leisurely out to take his plunge in the sea. By-and-by, when Mrs. Bent and John were seated at tea, he came hurrying back in commotion, carrying his towels.

"Can you tell me at what time they dine at Greylands' Rest?"

"At six o'clock, sir, when they dine late," replied John. "Mostly, though, it's in the middle of the day."

"And as often five o'clock as six," put in Mrs. Bent. "The earlier Mrs. Castlemaine dines, the better she likes it. You may be late, sir."

"I quite forgot to ask Mr. Castlemaine the hour. Is that

the right time?" looking at the clock. "A quarter past five?"

"Right to a minute, sir. This clock never fails."

"And you say they sometimes dine at five. What will they think of me?"

He went leaping up the stairs, saying something about the thoughtless ways of wandering Arabs—by which the landlord and his wife understood him to mean artists. In an incredibly short time he was down again, dressed, and striding off to Greylands' Rest.

The first thing Mr. North noticed, on entering the garden, was the flutter of a white dress amongst the trees. It assured him that he was not late for dinner. He penetrated the trees, attracted by the voices within, and found himself in sight of Ethel Reene, and the young damsel recently spoken of—Miss Flora.

The white dress he had seen was Ethel's. She sat under the trees, a book resting in her lap, talking to Flora. That young lady, unmindful of her holiday attire—a costly and very pretty frock of grey silken gauze—for Mrs. Castlemaine had said she might dine at table—was astride on one of the branches. Ethel had in vain told her not to get up there. She jumped down at the sight of Mr. North: the frock was caught, and the result was destruction.

"There!" exclaimed Ethel, in undertones, for Mr. North had not quite reached them. "Your new frock! What a pity! If I were mamma I should never buy you anything but stuff and cotton."

Even Flora looked down ruefully at the damage.

"Pin it up, Ethel."

"I have no pins here. Besides, pinning would be useless. It must be mended. You had better show it to Eliza."

The spoilt child ran past Mr. North on her way indoors. He came up to Ethel, bowed, and then held his hand out. With a bright blush she put hers into it.

"I have been making great haste here, Miss Reene, not knowing the hour for dinner."

"We dine at six," replied Ethel. "Mamma has only just returned from her drive, and is dressing. Papa has been out all the afternoon."

"Is Madame Guise well to-day?"

"Not very. She has one of her bad headaches, I am sorry to say, and is in her room. She will be here shortly."

He sat down by Ethel, and took up the book she had been reading; a very old and attractive book—the "Vicar of Wakefield.'

"It is an excellent story!" he exclaimed.

"Have you read it?" asked Ethel, rising to proceed to the house.

"Indeed I have. Twenty times, I should think. My mother had a small store of these old English works, and I and my brother revelled in them."

"You have brothers and sisters?"

"Only one sister now. She is married and lives in France."

"Ah, then I can understand why you like to go there so much," said Ethel, all unconscious that he had never before been in England. "Is her husband French?"

"Yes," replied Mr. North. "What a lovely rose!" he cried, stooping over a tree they were passing, perhaps to change the conversation.

It was one of rare beauty: and Ethel, in her impulsive good-nature, plucked it and offered it to him. As he took it from her, their eyes met: in his own shone a look of strangely earnest thanks, mingled with admiration. Poor Ethel became crimson at the thought of what she had done, and would have taken back the flower had it been possible. She went on quickly to the glass-doors of the drawing-room; Mr. North followed, placing the rose in his button-hole.

Madame Guise was entering the room at the same moment. Mr. and Mrs. Castlemaine soon appeared; lastly, Miss Flora, her frock mended. Harry Castlemaine was not at home; some errand, either of business or pleasure, had taken him to Stilborough. Harry had been out a great deal of late: there seemed a restlessness upon him, and his father was beginning to notice it.

Mr. North was received (as he heard later from Madame Guise) quite en famille—which pleased him much. No alteration was made in the usual style of dinner, which was always sufficiently elaborate for chance visitors. As George North sat at table, watching the master, he could not bring himself to

believe that Charlotte's suspicions were correct. Good-looking, refined, and courtly, Mr. Castlemaine appeared to be the very last man capable of committing a secret crime. Every other moment some gesture of his, or glance, or tone of voice, put George North in mind of his father: and—no, he could not join in the doubts of poor Anthony's wife.

But he noticed one thing. That ever and anon Mr. Castlemaine would seem to forget himself, forget his position as host, and fall into abstraction, during which a curiously sad expression lay on his face, and his brow was knit as with some secret care. Then suddenly he would rouse himself, and be in an instant the self-possessed Master of Greylands again. But the fits of gloom did occur, and George North observed them.

Nevertheless, he could not entertain the terrible suspicions of his sister-in-law. That a great deal of mystery attached to his brother's disappearance, and that Mr. Castlemaine was in some way connected with it, or cognizant of it, he saw reason to recognize: but, of the darker accusation, he believed him to be innocent. And it went with George North very much against the grain to sit at Mr. Castlemaine's hospitable table under false colours, and not declare that he was his brother's son.

Something of this he hinted to Madame Guise. After dinner the party had strolled into the garden, grateful for the little air it afforded. Mr. North found himself momentarily alone with madame, near the sweeping elm-tree.

"Are you mad?" she hastily cried in French and in the deepest alarm, in response to the word or two he whispered. "Declare yourself! For the love of Heaven, recall your senses."

"It is downright deceit, Charlotte."

"Do you no longer care for your unfortunate brother? Have you lost all remembrance of your love for him?—of the ties of kindred?—of the time when you played together at your mother's knee? Do you think it cost *me* nothing to come here under only half a name—that it costs me no self-reproach, I who have as keen a sense of honour as you? But I do it for Anthony's sake; I bear all feeling of disgrace for him."

"That is just it," said George, "as it seems to me. It is little short of disgrace."

"But it must be borne—for my sake, and for Anthony's.

Were you to declare yourself, Mr. Castlemaine would take alarm; we should both be sent adrift; and, rely upon it, we should never discover more of poor Anthony than we know now. No, mon ami, go you from Greylands if you like, and leave me to continue my search alone; but, declare yourself you must not. Anthony would rise from his grave at your unnatural conduct."

"Charlotte, you are exciting yourself unnecessarily," he hastily whispered, for Mrs. Castlemaine was approaching. "I did not say I was going to declare myself; I only said how unpalatable this deceit is to me. But for Anthony's sake and yours, I would not bear it for a moment. As circumstances are, I must go on with it, and be George North perhaps to the end of the chapter."

"Not to the end," she murmured. "Not to the end. Anthony's fate will be discovered before very long—or my prayers and tears will have found no record in heaven."

Only at dusk did they go in to tea. Afterwards, Ethel was bade to sing some of her songs. George North—an excellent musician himself, with a soft, pleasant voice of his own—sat by the piano, listening to their melody, gazing through the twilight at her sweet face, and thinking that he had never been so near paradise.

When he took his departure, they accompanied him to the gate. The stars were out, the night was clear and still, the heat yet excessive. It chanced that he and Ethel walked side by side; it chanced that he held her hand longer than he had need have done when he said good-night. That parting would remain in Ethel's memory for ever, as the first conscious moment of love's awakening.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE VAULTS.

Time had again gone on. It was autumn weather. Mr. George North was making a tolerably long sojourn in the place, and seemed to be passing his days agreeably. Sketching, boating, gossiping, one would have said he had no earthly care. Perhaps

he had none—saving the one sweet care of making himself acceptable to Ethel Reene.

The fate of each was over and done with long ago, so far as concerned that grand master-passion of the heart—love. Ethel was helplessly in love with him for all time. "Ma caprice est faite," she might have said to Madame Guise in that lady's native language; and madame would have opened her eyes in hearing it. For in regard to the affection that had sprung up between those two young people, madame was entirely in the dark. Not very observant by nature, her whole thoughts occupied with the one great trouble of her life, she remained wholly unsuspicious of what was passing in the inner life of those around her.

George North's love for Ethel made his very existence. The purest, truest affection man can feel, beat in his heart for Ethel Reene. To meet, was with both the one great event of the day; the hope to look forward to when they rose in the morning, the remembrance that glowed within their breasts at night. On the solitary cliffs by the coastguard-station: on the sheltered beach; amidst the lovely scenery where he carried his pencils—in one place or another they were sure to meet. The soft wind whispered love-songs, the varying tints of the autumn foliage were brilliant as the trees on the everlasting shores, the very air was fraught with celestial perfume; and for each the world was a Garden of Eden.

Mrs. Castlemaine was no wiser than madame. She had discerned nothing. Perhaps their first intimacy grew during a few days that she was absent from home. Disappointed of the promised excursion to Paris—for Mr. Castlemaine had allowed the months to go on and on, and did not attempt to enter on it—Mrs. Castlemaine went off on a ten days' visit to some friends in the adjoining county, taking Flora with her. This was just after the appearance of George North at Greylands. Ethel, left at home under the chaperonage of madame, saw a good deal of Mr. George North: and the mutual liking, already rising in either heart, changed to love. Long before Mrs. Castlemaine's absence had come to an end, they were secretly conscious that they were all in all to each other.

Mrs. Castlemaine returned, and neither saw nor suspected anything. Perhaps she was not likely to do so, for true love

is essentially reticent. Neither had Mr. North breathed a word to Ethel. He was not prepared to do so. Before he could speak, he must be able to declare himself in his own true colours. And circumstances as yet made that impossible.

He had learned absolutely nothing in regard to his brother's fate. He had explored, as he believed, every nook and portion of the Friar's Keep; but without success of any sort. It appeared to be lonely, deserted, and in places dilapidated, affording no spots for concealment. There existed no trace of Anthony. George North stayed on at the Dolphin, waiting patiently for any light that might or might not come to him; listening, whenever they met, to his sister-in-law's most unshaken belief that light *would* come: and perfectly contented so to stay on while he could see Ethel and feed his heart's love for her, though the stay had been for ever.

Midnight was striking from the old turret-clock of the Grey Nunnery. Standing at the open window of her bedroom, was Miss Castlemaine. She had now put off the mourning for her father, and assumed the grey dress of the Sisterhood. A warm black shawl was wrapped about her shoulders, for the night-air was somewhat cold. It was late for any of the Grey Sisters to be up; unless detained by sickness, they went to rest early: but Miss Castlemaine had come in rather late from spending the evening at Greylands' Rest, and had afterwards sat up writing a long letter. She had now been in her room some little time, and had not yet begun to undress. She stood leaning on the window-sill, deep in thought as she gazed out at the wide expanse of the sea. Scarcely a night of the past summer but she had stood as she was standing now. To look over the still sea in this silent hour, or at its waves, flashing white under the moon or starlight, and lost in thought, was a positive luxury to Miss Castlemaine.

It was not her own chamber that she was now in, but Sister Mildred's. Sister Mildred was away. Her health had much improved; but Mr. Parker, the doctor, had declared that a month or two's change was necessary: and Sister Mildred departed to visit some relatives she had not seen for many years. She would now be shortly returning, and Mary Ursula's occupancy of her room was only temporary. The approach of

cold weather had caused some necessary alterations in Mary Ursula's chamber: and during the process, she had occupied the chamber of Sister Mildred.

The lapse of months had not diminished her uneasiness regarding the disappearance of her unfortunate cousin Anthony. The Friar's Keep still wore for her an atmosphere of uncertainty and mystery. Over and over again, since the night when Sister Mildred had discovered to her the secret passage, and she had explored it with that lady, had the wish—nay, the resolve—made itself heard within her to go again through that same passage, and explore the Keep. She knew not how or why, but the fear that Anthony had been treacherously dealt with grew stronger day by day. Not by Mr. Castlemaine: she never feared that: and resented the doubt cast upon him by the world—which he in his pride would not condescend to notice: and she believed that, if the truth could be discovered, it would be doing her uncle good service. By exploring, herself, the Friar's Keep, she might be able to trace out nothing: but at least the desire lay upon her. The figure which Mary had seen with her own eyes, bearing its lamp, and which was religiously believed by the small community of Greylands to be the ghost of the wicked monk, long since dead and gone, possessed no terrors for her. That it was some living being, personating the dead monk for a purpose, she felt assured; and she could not help fancying that in some unknown manner it must be concerned with the fate of Anthony.

Circumstances had brought all these matters more especially before her to-night. An old friend of hers, a Mrs. Hunter of Stilborough, had been also a visitor, though a chance one, that evening at Greylands' Rest. Mrs. Hunter was very fond of Mr. Castlemaine. She ridiculed the doubt thrown upon him in connection with his vanished nephew; and, to prove her opinion, rather liked talking of the affair. She had introduced it that evening at Greylands' Rest, asking all sorts of questions about the Keep, about the ghost that sometimes appeared there, and about Anthony. During this conversation, Mary Ursula noticed that her uncle was remarkably silent; and once she caught a look of painful uneasiness on his face. As they were walking home—for Mr. Castlemaine himself had brought her back to the Grey Nunnery—she ventured to allude to it.

"You have never heard anything of Anthony, I suppose, Uncle James?"

"Never," was Mr. Castlemaine's reply.

"Is it not strange that some of his friends in France do not inquire after him? He must have had friends there."

"I'm sure I don't know," was the curt answer.

"What do *you* think became of him, uncle?"

"My dear, the affair has altogether so annoyed me that I don't care even to think about it. We will drop the subject, Mary Ursula."

Now, this was not satisfactory—and Mary felt that it was not so. Of course it closed her lips upon the subject of Anthony; but she put another question not much less hazardous.

"Who is the figure that shows himself sometimes as the ghost of the Grey Monk?"

"I do not understand you."

The answer caused her to pause: the tones were certainly resentful.

"He who walks about with his lamp, uncle."

"Well?"

"Surely you do not believe—that it is really a ghost?"

"I am content not to be wiser than my neighbours," replied Mr. Castlemaine. "I suppose I have some elements of superstition within me. We are none of us responsible for our own nature, you know, Mary Ursula."

She said no more. In fact, they reached the Nunnery gate just then. Mr. Castlemaine saw her indoors, and went back again. Mary sat late, writing, and then came up to her room.

She was thinking over it all now, as she stood at the window, the fresh sea-air blowing upon her somewhat heated brow. There was no moon, but the night was passably light. Gentle waves stirred the surface of the water; a faint ripple might be heard from the incoming tide. It had turned some three hours since, and now covered, as Mary knew, the narrow pathway beneath the Nunnery, but not the strip of beach at the Friar's Keep. That beach, however, would be inaccessible for some hours, except by sea. Some night boats were out, fishing as usual: she could discern their lights in the distance. Almost immediately opposite to her, and not far off, stood a two-masted vessel at anchor. She wondered why it should have come to

that solitary spot, so close in-shore, instead of the usual place off the beach. It may almost be said that she saw and thought these things unconsciously in her preoccupation.

Nothing surprised her more than Mr. Castlemaine's implied admission of his belief in the supernatural appearance of the Grey Friar. An impression was abroad among the fishermen that the Castlemaines believed in the ghost as firmly as they did themselves: but until to-night Mary had smiled at this. Look where she would, it seemed nothing but mystery.

More unpleasant thoughts, though of a different nature, had been given to Mary that night by Mrs. Hunter. One of Mary's chief friends in Stilborough had been a Mrs. Ord; she and Mary had been girls together. The husband, Colonel Ord, was in India: the young wife, who was delicate, remained at home. Sad news had now arrived from India. Colonel Ord was dead; had died suddenly; it was supposed in consequence of excitement at the failure of an Indian bank, in which all his property was placed. Mrs. Hunter had given this news at Greylands' Rest: and had moreover whispered an announcement that had just been made public—the engagement of William Blake-Gordon to the heiress of Mountsorrel.

Miss Castlemaine's reflections—and they were very painful—were interrupted by some stir that appeared to be taking place on board the two-masted vessel. Suddenly, as it seemed to her, two boats shot away from it, one after the other. The rowers seemed to be steering straight for this end of the Nunnery; and Mary watched in surprise. No: they were making, it was quite clear now, for the Friar's Keep higher up. Stretching out as far as she dared, Mary saw them make straight for the little beach. Wild ideas, devoid of reason, arose within her: but at night the imagination soars away on curious wings. Had these boats anything to do with Anthony? Were they bringing him back, in life or in death, to Greylands?

The night went on. She saw other boats come: she saw boats go back; she saw them return again. Surely she was not dreaming all this! And yet it seemed impossible. At length an uncontrollable impulse took posssesion of her—she would then and there enter the secret passage and try to solve the mystery.

Fastening her warm shawl more securely round her, and

putting on a dark silken hood, she unlocked her drawers, took out the keys of the passage, and softly descended the stairs. When she came to the stone steps leading to the damp vaults below, lighted only by the solitary lantern she held, Mary's courage deserted her. Brave, good woman though she was, she halted, and asked herself whether she could go on alone. Alone she must go if she went at all: not for a great deal would she disclose the existence of this passage to any of the Sisters, or let them know of her errand. Sister Mildred was the only one who shared the secret, and Sister Mildred was away.

Taking a few minutes to recover herself, Mary at length went on. Arrived at the door, she unlocked it with great trouble: and then went swiftly along the passage in a sort of desperation. The door at the other end unlocked, though not with less difficulty, she once more, for the second time in her life, found herself in the cloistered vaults underneath the Keep.

Pausing again to gather what bravery would come to her, her hand pressed on her beating heart, she proceeded about the place with her lantern; throwing its light here and there. At first she could see no trace of any one, living or dead; could hear no sound. Soon she halted abruptly; a thought had come to her, bringing a sick fear with it—suppose she should not be able to find her way back to the passage-door, but must remain there until daylight? Daylight? what light of day could penetrate those unearthly vaults?—they must be always, by day and by night, dark as the grave. As she stood undecided whether to search on or to return at once, she became conscious of a sensation of fresh air, that brought with it a smell of the sea.

Stepping gently forward, she found an opening. A door, or whatever it was, open to the strip of beach under the Friar's Keep, and to the sea beyond. All seemed perfectly quiet: there was neither sight nor sound of human being; but as she stood in the stillness she caught the regular dip of distant oars in the water, belonging no doubt to the retreating boats.

What could it mean? Even this aperture, in the hitherto supposed impregnable walls—was it a new opening, or had it always existed? Mary stood wondering and listening; peering into the darkness of the night.

These vaults, how much farther did they extend? She could

not conjecture, and dared not attempt to discover, lest she lost her way: these pillared cloisters all seemed so like one another that she must not risk it. Turning away from the fresh breeze and the welcome smell of the sea, she began to retrace her steps.

To retrace them, as she imagined, her thoughts very full. The question had been mooted as to whether any means existed by which the unfortunate Anthony Castlemaine could be disposed of, if the worst had happened to him: say, any facility for consigning him to the sea? The answer had always been: Not from the Friar's Keep, for the Keep had no communication whatever with the sea. But, it now seemed that this communication did exist—as Mary had just seen. Her thoughts came unpleasantly quickly as she groped along, and laid her disengaged hand on her bosom to still its pain.

But where was the door? She had come far, and yet no sign of it appeared. Was she indeed lost in this ghostly place? Her heart beat more wildly at the thought.

She was very cautious in using the lantern, lest it should betray her if any one chanced to be there. She moved it gently here and there: but no trace of the door did it disclose. Nothing was to be seen but the dark stone floor of the vaults, with their pillars and arches. Lost! lost!

At that moment a sound, as of a door banging, echoed amongst the pillars, and she hastily darkened the lantern.

Other sounds came. Some door had evidently been closed, for now it was being barred and bolted. It was not very near, and Mary Ursula waited. Then, turning on the full light of her lantern again, she went swiftly, blindly, in search of the passage-door.

Ah, what a blessing! There it was, before her. Perhaps in all her life she had never experienced a moment of greater relief. A sound of joy faintly escaped her; an aspiration of thankfulness went up from her heart.

She had brought the keys with her, as a precaution, in case the door should close; they were tied together with string, and she had put the key belonging to this door into the lock on this side: Sister Mildred had done the same on the occasion of their first expedition. But now, as she stood there, Mary found she could not easily withdraw the key: it might have

got turned in the lock, and the lock was hard and rusty: so she had to put down the lantern, first of all closing its three sides, and take both hands to the key.

She had just got it out and pushed the door open, and was gliding softly and swiftly through, when a bright light was thrown upon her, and a rough hand grasped her shoulder. With a cry of inexpressible terror, Mary turned, and saw a pistol held close to her face.

"Oh, don't!" she cried. "Spare me! spare me! I am Miss Castlemaine."

The man, who looked young, and was short and sturdy, turned in the doorway, with his dark lantern, without speaking a word. At that unlucky moment, the door swung against his elbow, and the pistol went off. Down he dropped with a cry of agony.

Whether Mary Ursula retained her senses for the instant, she never afterwards knew. Fear and the instinct of self-preservation would have caused her to fly: but how could she leave the wounded man to his fate? The whole place seemed to reel around her; her head swam, and she leaned against the wall for support.

"Are you here alone?" she asked, bending down, when she could recover some little strength and spirit.

"I be, ma'am. The rest are all gone."

Surely she knew that voice! Taking her lantern, she threw its light upon his face, and recognized Walter Dance, the fisherman's son: a young fellow with whom she had had a friendly chat only yesterday: and to whom she had given many a little present when he was a lad.

"Is it you, Walter!" she exclaimed, in the utmost astonishment; her worst fears disappearing as if by magic at the discovery. "What were you doing here?"

No answer, beyond a few dismal groans.

"Are you much hurt?"

"I am just killed," he moaned. "Oh, ma'am! who is to help me?"

Who indeed! Mary Ursula had an innate dread of such calamities; she had a true woman's sensitive heart, shrinking terribly from the very thought of contact with these woes of life. "I do not know that I can help you, Walter," she faintly

said. "Where are you hurt? Do you think you could get up?"

He began to try, and she helped him to his feet. The left arm was powerless; and the young man said his left side was also. He leaned upon her, begging her pardon for the liberty, and looking about him in dismay.

"Where does this passage lead to, ma'am?"

"To the Grey Nunnery. Could you manage to walk to it?"

"I must get somewhere, lady, where I can be helped, or I shall bleed to death. If the bullet is not in me, it must be in the wall."

Blood came from the arm. Beginning to feel faint again, feeling also very much as though she had been the cause of this, perhaps had cost the young man his life, Mary Ursula bound up the arm as well as she could, with her handkerchief and with his.

"Will you go on with me to the Nunnery, Walter?"

"Yes, ma'am, an' I can get there. I never knew of this here passage."

She locked the door, took the keys and the two lanterns herself, giving him the pistol, and bade Walter lean upon her. Walking seemed to hurt him much, and he moaned frequently. In spite of his hardy fisherman's life, he was a very bad one to bear pain. When they came to the vaults of the Nunnery and had to ascend the stairs, his face turned livid, and he clutched Miss Castlemaine tightly to save himself from falling. The pistol dropped from his hand.

She got him into a small room off the kitchen, where accidents had been attended to before—for, indeed, the Grey Nunnery was somewhat of a hospital, and the good Sisters were its tender nurses. A capacious sofa was there, and down he sank upon it. Mary waited to light a candle, and then hastened away for help.

"You shall have a little brandy directly, Walter," she said. "I am going now for assistance: we must get Mr. Parker here."

He only moaned in answer: the agony in his side seemed terrible: but as Miss Castlemaine was leaving the room, he called her back again.

"Lady," he cried with feverish earnestness, and there was a wildly eager look in his eyes as they sought hers, "don't tell

how it was done; don't tell where you saw me, or aught about it. I shall say my pistol went off in the chapel ruins, and that I crawled to your door for succour. I've a reason for it."

"Very well: be it so," assented Miss Castlemaine, after a moment's reflection. It would be at least as inconvenient for her, were the truth confessed, as for him.

He looked frightfully pale: and, to Miss Castlemaine's horror, she saw stains of blood upon his clothes, which must come from the wound in his side. Flying up the stairs, she entered the first chamber, where Sisters Ann and Phœby slept; aroused them with a word or two of explanation, and was back again almost instantly with some water and the brandy kept for emergencies. The Sisters were down almost as soon as she was; they were both capable women in such a case, almost as good as doctors. They saw to his side, and bound it up, just as Mary Ursula had bound up his arm. Sister Ann then ran off for Mr. Parker, and Sister Phœby went to the kitchen to light the fire and prepare hot water, leaving Miss Castlemaine alone with the patient.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SHOOTING A NIGHT-BIRD.

WALTER DANCE'S situation appeared to be critical. Miss Castlemaine, quite unused to accidents, feared it was so, and he himself fully believed it. He thought the great conqueror of us all, who is called the King of Terors, was upon him, and it brought to him indeed a terror not of this world.

"I am dying," he moaned; "I am dying." And his frame shook as with an ague, his teeth chattered, and beads of water stood on his livid face. "Lord, pardon me! Oh, ma'am, pray for me."

The young man had been all his life so especially undemonstrative that his agitation was the more notable now from the very contrast. Mary, full of fear herself and little less agitated than he, could only strive to appear calm, as she bent over him and took his hands.

"Nay, Walter, it may not be as serious as you fear; I think

it is not," she gently said. "Mr. Parker will be here presently. Don't excite yourself, my good lad; pray don't."

"I am dying," he reiterated; "I shall never get over this. Oh, ma'am, you ladies be like parsons for goodness: couldn't you say a prayer?"

She knelt down and raised her hands to utter a few words of earnest prayer; such as she thought might best comfort him. His own hands lay still. These ladies of the Nunnery were looked upon by the fishermen as being very near to Heaven; nearer (let it be whispered) than was Parson Marston.

"I've done a many wicked thing, lady," he began when her voice ceased, apparently saying it in the light of a confession. "I've often angered father and grandmother beyond bearing: and this night-work, I've never liked it. I suppose it's a wrong thing in God's sight: but father, he brought me in to it, as 'twere, and what was I to do?"

"What night-work?" she asked.

But there came no answer. Mary would not repeat the question. He was lying in extreme agitation. She put the brandy-and-water to his lips.

"I must tell it afore I go," he resumed, as if in response to some battle with himself. "Ma'am, you'll promise me never to repeat it again?"

"I never will," she replied earnestly, remembering that death-bed confessions, made under the seal of secrecy, should, of all things, be held sacred. "If you have anything to confess, Walter, that it may comfort you to disclose, tell it me with every confidence, for it shall never pass my lips."

"It's not for my sake, you see, that it must be kept, but for their sakes: the Castlemaines."

"The what?" she cried, not catching the words.

"And for father's and the Commodore's, and all the rest of 'em. It would spoil all, you see, ma'am, for the future—and they'd never forgive me as I lay in my grave."

She wondered whether he was wandering. "I do not understand you, Walter."

"It all belongs to Mr. Castlemaine, father thinks, though the Commodore manages it, and makes believe it's his. Sometimes the master comes down, and sometimes Mr. Harry; but it's Teague and us that does it all."

"What is it that you are talking about?" she reiterated.

"The smuggling," he whispered.

"The smuggling?"

"Yes, the smuggling. Oh, ma'am, don't ever tell of it! It would just be the ruin of father and the men, and anger Mr. Castlemaine beyond bearing."

Her thoughts ran off to Mr. Superintendent Nettleby, and to the poor fishermen, whom it was that officer's mission to suspect of possessing drams of unlawful brandy and pouches of contraband tobacco. She certainly believed the poor brain had lost its balance.

"We've run a cargo to-night," he whispered; "a good one too. The rest had cleared off, and there was only me left to lock the doors. When I see the glimmer of your light, ma'am, and somebody moving, I thought it was one of the men left behind, but when I got up and found it was a woman's garments, I feared it was a spy of the preventive officers, come to betray us."

"What cargo did you run?" she inquired, scarcely knowing that she put the question in her mind's confusion.

"I fancy 'twas lace. It generally is lace, father thinks. Nothing pays like that."

Curious ideas were crowding on her, as she remembered the boats putting to and fro that night from the vessel lying at anchor. Of what strange secret was she being made cognizant? Could it be that some of the mystery attaching to the Friar's Keep was about to be thus strangely and unexpectedly cleared to her?

"Walter, let me understand. Do you mean to say that smuggling is carried on in connection with the Friar's Keep?"

"Yes, it is. It have been for years. Once a month, or so, there's a cargo run: sometimes oftener. An underground passage leads from the Keep to the Hutt, and the goods are stowed away in the cellar there till the Commodore can take 'em away to the receivers in his spring cart."

"And who knows of all this?" she asked, after a pause. "I mean in Greylands."

"Only father and me," he faintly said, for he was growing exhausted. "They've not dared to trust anybody else. That's quite enough to know it—us. The sailors bring in the goods,

and we wheel 'em up the passage: Teague, and me, and father. I've seen Mr. Harry put his hand to the barrow afore now. George Hallet—Jane's brother—he knew of it, and helped too. We had to be trusted, him and me, being on father's boat."

In the midst of her compassion for this young man, a feeling of resentment arose in Mary's heart. There might be truth in the tale he told regarding the smuggling—nay, the manœuvres of the boats that night and the unknown door she had seen open to the narrow beach, seemed to confirm it: but that this nefarious work was countenanced by, or even known to, the Master of Greylands, she utterly rejected. If there was, in her belief, one man more honourable than any other on the face of the earth, more proudly conscious of his own uprightness, it was her uncle James. Pride had always been his failing. Walter Dance must be either wandering in mind or must have taken up a fallacious fancy: perhaps been imposed upon by his father for some private motive. The work must be Teague's, and his only.

"Walter, you are not in a condition to be contradicted," she said gently, "but I know you are mistaken as to Mr. Castlemaine. He could not have any cognizance of such an affair as this—or his son either."

"Why, the business is theirs, ma'am; their very own: father don't feel a doubt of it. The Commodore only manages it for 'em."

"You may have been led to suppose so: but it cannot be true. My uncle James is the soul of honour. Can you suppose that a gentleman like Mr. Castlemaine would lend himself to a long-continued system of fraud?"

"I've always thought 'twas his," groaned Walter. "I've seen him there standing to look on."

"You must have been mistaken. Did you see him there to-night?"

"No, ma'am."

"Nor any other night, my poor lad, as I will venture to answer for."

"He might have been there to-night, though, without my seeing him," returned the young man, who seemed scarcely conscious of her words.

"How should you have left the vaults, but for this accident?" she asked, the question striking her.

"I had locked the door on the sea, and was going straight up the passage to the Hutt," he groaned, the pain in his side growing intolerable.

"One question, Walter, and then I will not trouble you with more," she breathed, and her voice trembled as she spoke. "Carry your thoughts back to that night, last February, when young Mr. Anthony was said to disappear within the Friar's Keep——"

"I know," he interrupted.

"Was any cargo run that night?"

"I can't tell," he answered, lifting his eyes for a moment to hers. "I was ill abed with a touch of the ague; I get it sometimes. I don't think father was abroad that night, either."

"Have you ever known, ever heard any hint, or rumour, from your father or the Commodore or the sailors who run these cargoes, that could throw any light on Mr. Anthony's fate?"

"Never. Never a word."

"Who are the sailors that come?"

"Mostly foreigners. Is it *very* sinful?'" he added in an access of agony, more bodily than mental. "Very sinful to have helped at this, though father did lead me? Will God forgive it?"

"Oh yes, yes," she answered. "God is so merciful that He forgives every sin repented of—sins that are a great deal blacker than this. Besides, you have not acted from your own will, it seems, but in obedience to authority."

"I think I'm dying," he murmured. "I can't bear this pain long."

She wiped the dew from his face, and again held the brandy-and-water to his lips. Walter Dance had always been in the highest degree sensitive to physical pain. Many another man, lying as he was now with these same injuries, would not have uttered a moan. Brave Tom Dance, his father, was wont to tell him that if ever he met with a sharpish hurt he'd turn out a very woman.

"If Dr. Parker would but come!" he cried restlessly. "Lady, you are sure he is sent for?"

As if in answer to the doubt, the bell rang out, and Mr. Parker's voice was heard, as he entered the Nunnery. Sister Ann had brought not only the doctor, but John Bent also. Miss Castlemaine felt vexed and surprised to see the latter. Some faint idea, or hope, had been lying within her of keeping this untoward affair secret, at least for a few hours; and no one had a longer tongue in a quiet way than the landlord of the Dolphin. She cast a look of reproach on the Sister.

"It was not my fault, madam," whispered Sister Ann, interpreting the glance. "Mr. Bent came over with us without as much as asking leave."

"Bless my heart, Dance, here's a pretty kettle o' fish," began the surgeon, looking down on the patient. "You have shot yourself, Sister Ann says. And now, how did it happen?"

"Pistol went off unawares," groaned Walter. "I think I'm dying."

"Not just yet, let us hope," said the doctor, cheerily, as he began to turn to the work before him.

Sending Miss Castlemaine from the room, the doctor called for Sister Ann, who had helped him before in attending to accidents, and had as good a nerve as he. Mary, glad to be dismissed, went into the kitchen to Sister Phœby, and there indulged in a sudden fit of crying. The events of the night had strangely unnerved her.

If Sister Ann speculated as to the displeasure visible in the Superior's face at the appearance of John Bent, she ascribed it solely to the score of possible excitement to the patient. As she hastened to whisper, it was not her fault. Upon returning from Mr. Parker's, he and she were bending their hasty steps across the road from the corner of the inn, when, to the astonishment of both, the voice of John Bent accosted them, loud and clear in the silence of the night. Turning, they saw the landlord standing at his open door.

"Keeping watch to see the sun rise, John?" asked the doctor, jestingly.

"Keeping watch for my lodger," replied the landlord, in grumbling tones, for he was sleepy and resented being kept out of bed. "Mr. North went off this afternoon with his sketch-book and things, ordering some supper to be ready at nine o'clock, as he should miss his dinner, and he has never come

back again. It is to be hoped we are not to have a second edition of the disappearance of young Anthony Castlemaine."

"Pooh!" quoth the doctor. "Mr. North has only lost his way."

"I hope it may prove so!" replied the landlord, grimly: for his fears were at work, though at present they had taken no definite shape. "What is calling you abroad at this hour, doctor?"

"Young Dance has shot himself," interposed Sister Ann, who had been bursting with the strange news, and felt supremely elated at having some one to tell it to.

"Dance shot himself!" echoed the landlord, following them upon impulse, to hear more. "Where? How did he do it?"

"Goodness knows!" returned Sister Ann. "He must have done it somewhere—and come to the Nunnery somehow. Sister Mary Ursula was still sitting up, we conclude—which was fortunate, as no time was lost. When we went to bed after prayers, she remained in the parlour to write letters."

In the astonishment created by the tidings, John Bent accompanied them to the Nunnery, leaving his own open door unprotected—but at that hour of the morning there was little to fear from strangers. That was the explanation of his appearance. And there they were, the doctor and Sister Ann, busy with the wounded man, and John Bent satisfying his curiosity by listening to the few disconnected words of enlightenment that Walter chose to give as to the cause of the accident, and by fingering the pistol, which lay on the table.

"Will the injuries prove fatal?" asked Miss Castlemaine of the surgeon, when the latter at length came forth.

"Dear me, no!" was the reply, as he entered the parlour, at the door of which she stood. "Don't distress yourself by thinking of such a thing, my dear lady. A little blood makes a great show, you know; and no doubt the pain is sharp. There's no reason for fear; not much damage, in fact: and he feels reassured, now I have put him to rights."

"The ball was not in him?"

"Nothing of the kind. When I tell you that the longest job will be the broken arm, and that it is the more serious of the two, you may judge how slight it all is. Slight, of course, in comparison with what might have been."

"Did the ball go through the arm?"

"Through the flesh only. The arm must have got awkwardly doubled under him somehow, and broke in falling. We shall soon have him well again."

Mary gave a deep sigh of thankfulness. It would have been a very awful thing for her had his life been sacrificed. She felt somewhat faint herself, and sat down on the nearest chair.

"This has been too much for you," said the doctor; "you are not used to such things. And you must have been sitting up late, my dear young lady—which is very wrong. Surely you could write your letters in the daytime!"

"I do things sometimes upon impulse," she answered with a faint smile. "Hearing sad news of an old friend from Mrs. Hunter, whom I met at Greylands' Rest last evening, I sat down to write to her soon after my return."

"And spun out your letter unconsciously—it is always the case. For my part, I think there's a fascination in night-work. Well, it was lucky for young Dance that you were up. You heard him at the door, he says, and hastened to him."

A deep blush suffused her face. She could only tacitly uphold the deceit.

"His is rather a lame tale, though, by the way—what I can understand of it," resumed Mr. Parker. "However, it did not do to question him closely, and the lad was no doubt confused besides. We shall come to the bottom of it to-morrow."

"You are going home?" she asked.

"There's no necessity to remain. We have made him comfortable for the rest of the night with pillows and blankets. Sister Ann means to sit up with him: not that she need do so. To-morrow we will move him to his own home."

"Will he be well enough for that?"

"Quite. He might have been carried there now had means been at hand. And do you go up to bed at once, and get some rest," concluded the doctor, as he shook hands and took his departure.

John Bent had already gone home. To his great relief, the first object he saw was Mr. North, who arrived at the inn door, just as he himself did. The surgeon's supposition, spoken carelessly though it was, proved correct. George North had

missed his way in returning; had gone miles and miles out of the road, and then had to retrace his steps.

"I'm dead beat," he said to the landlord, with a laugh. "Fearfully hungry, but too tired to eat. It all comes of not knowing the country; and there was no one up to inquire the way of. By daylight, I should not have made so stupid a mistake."

"Well, I have been worrying myself with all sorts of fancies, sir," said John. "It seemed just as though you had gone off for good in the wake of young Mr. Anthony Castlemaine."

"I wish to goodness I had!" was the impulsive, thoughtless rejoinder, spoken with ringing earnestness.

"Sir!"

Mr. North recollected himself, and did what he could to repair the slip.

"I should at least have had the pleasure of learning where this Mr. Anthony Castlemaine had gone to—and that would have been a satisfaction to you all," he said carelessly.

"You are making a joke of it, sir," said the landlord, in tones of reproach. "With some of us it is a matter all too solemn: I fear it was so with him. What will you take, sir?"

"A glass of ale—and then I will go to bed. I am, as I say, too tired to eat. And I am very sorry indeed, Mr. Bent, to have kept you up."

"That's nothing, now you've come back safely," was the hearty reply. "Besides, I'm not sorry it has happened so, sir, for I've had an adventure. That young Walter Dance has gone and shot himself to-night; he is lying at the Grey Nunnery, and I have but now been over there with Mr. Parker."

"Why, how did he manage that?" cried Mr. North, who knew young Dance very well.

"I hardly know, sir. We couldn't make top or tail of what he said: and the doctor wouldn't have him bothered. It was something about shooting a night-bird with a pistol, and he shot himself instead."

"Where?"

"In the chapel ruins."

"The chapel ruins!" echoed Mr. North—and he was about to add that Walter Dance would not go to the chapel ruins at night for untold gold; but the landlord went on.

"He seemed to say it was the chapel ruins, sir; but we might have misunderstood him. Any way, it sounds a bit mysterious. He was in fearful pain when the doctor got in, and thought he was dying."

"Poor fellow! It was only yesterday morning I went for a sail with him. Is he seriously injured?"

"No, sir; the damages turn out to be nothing much, now they are looked into."

"I am glad of that," said Mr. North; "I like young Dance. Good-night to you, Mr. Bent. Or, rather, good-morning," he called back, as he went up the staircase.

Miss Castlemaine also retired. The first thing she did on reaching her room was to look out for the two-masted vessel. Not a trace of it remained. It must have weighed anchor and sailed away in the silence of the night.

Mr. Parker was over betimes in the morning at the Grey Nunnery. His patient was going on quite satisfactorily.

Reassured upon the point of danger, and in considerably less pain than at first, Walter Dance's spirits had gone up proportionately. He said he felt quite well enough to be removed home—which would be done after breakfast.

"Passato il pericolo, gabbato il santo," says the Italian proverb. We have ours somewhat to the same effect, beginning "When the devil was sick"—which being well known to the reader, need not be further quoted. Young Mr. Walter Dance presented an apt illustration of the same. On the previous night, when he believed himself to be dying, he was ready and eager to tell every secret pressing on his soul: this morning, finding he was going to live, his mood had changed, and he could have bitten out his unfortunate tongue for its folly.

He was well disposed, as young men go, truthful and conscientious. It would have gone against the grain with him to do an injury to any living man. He lay dwelling on the injury he might now have done, by this disclosure, to many people—and they were just those people whom, of all the world, he would most care to cherish and respect. Well, there was but one thing to do now, he thought: truthful though he was by nature, he must eat his words, and so try to repair the mischief.

Mary Ursula rose rather late. Walter Dance had had his

breakfast when she went down, and she was told of the doctor's satisfactory report. Much commotion had been excited in the Nunnery when the Grey Ladies heard what had happened. They had their curiosity, just as other people have theirs; and Sister Ann gave them the version of the story as she had gathered it. The young man had been up at the chapel ruins to shoot a night-bird, the pistol had gone off, wounding him in the arm and side, and he came crawling on all fours to the Grey Nunnery. The Superior, Sister Mary Ursula, sitting up late at her letters, heard him at the door, helped him in, and called for assistance.

Well, it was a strange affair, the ladies decided; stranger than anything that had ever before happened at the Grey Nunnery: but they trusted he would get over it. And did not all events happen for the best! To think that it should be just that night, of all others, that Sister Mary Ursula remained below!

Mary Ursula went into the sick-room, and was surprised at the improved appearance of the patient. His face had lost its anxiety and was bright again. He looked up at her gratefully, and smiled.

"They are so kind to me, lady!—and I owe it all to you."

Mary Ursula sat down by the couch. Late though it was when she went to rest, she had been unable to sleep, and had risen with one of the bad headaches to which she was occasionally subject. The strange disclosure made by Walter Dance, added to other matters, had troubled her brain and kept her awake. Whilst saying to herself that so disgraceful an aspersion on the Castlemaines was more than unjustifiable, outrageously improbable, some latent fear in her heart kept suggesting the idea—what if it should be true? With the broad light of day, she had intended to throw it to the winds—but she found that she could not do so. The anxiety was tormenting her.

"Walter," she began in low tones, after talking a little with him about his injuries, "I want to speak to you of what you disclosed to me last night. When I got up this morning I thought in truth I must have dreamt it."

"Dreamt what?" he asked.

"About the smuggling," she whispered. "And what you

said, reflecting on my uncle. You are more collected this morning; tell me what is truth and what is not."

"I must have talked a deal of nonsense last night, ma'am," spoke the young man, after a pause, as he turned his uneasy face to the wall—for uneasy it was growing. "I'm sure I can't remember it a bit."

She told him what he had said.

"What a fool I must have been! 'Twas the pain, lady, made me fancy it. Smugglers in the Friar's Keep! Well, that *is* good!"

"Do you mean to say it is not true?" she cried eagerly.

"Not a word on't, ma'am. I had a fever once, when I was a little 'un—I talked a rare lot o' nonsense then. Enough to set the place afire, grandmother said."

"And there is no smuggling carried on?—and what you said implicating Mr. Castlemaine has no foundation excepting in your brain?" she reiterated, half bewildered with this new aspect.

"If I said such outrageous things, my wits must have gone clean out of me," asserted Walter. "Mr. Castlemaine would be fit to hang me, ma'am, if it came to his ears."

"But—if there is nothing of the kind carried on, what of the boats last night?" asked Mary Ursula, collecting her senses a little. "What were they doing?"

"Boats, lady!" returned Walter, showing the most supreme unconsciousness. "What boats?"

"Boats that put off from an anchored vessel, and kept passing to and fro between it and the Keep."

"If there was boats, they must have come off for some purpose of their own," asserted the young man, looking very puzzled. "And what did I do, down where you found me, you ask, ma'am? Well, I went there to shoot a bird; that beach is the quietest place for 'em."

Was he wandering now?—or had he been wandering then? Miss Castlemaine really could not decide the question. But for having seen and heard the boats herself, she would have believed the whole to be a disordered dream, induced by weakness arising from loss of blood.

"But how did you get there, Walter?"

"Down that there slippery zig-zag from the chapel ruins. The tide was partly up, you say, ma'am? Oh, I don't mind

getting wet, I don't. The door? Well, I've always known about that there door, and I pushed it open: it don't do to talk of it, and so we *don't* talk of it: it mightn't be liked, you see, ma'am. 'Twas hearing a stir inside made me go in: I thought a bird must have got in there; and when I saw your light, ma'am, I was nigh frightened to death. As to boats—I'm sure there was none."

And that was all Mary could get from Mr. Walter Dance this morning. Press him as she might now—though she did not dare press him too much for fear of exciting fever—she could bring forth no other answer, no admission of any kind. And he earnestly begged her never to repeat a word of his "tattle" to his father, or anybody else.

In the course of the morning, Tom Dance and two or three fishermen-friends of his came to the Grey Nunnery to convey Walter home. The rumour of what had happened had caused commotion abroad, and all the village, men and women, turned out to inspect the removal. Fishermen, for that tide, abandoned their boats, women their homes and household cares. No such excitement had arisen for Greylands since the vanishing of Anthony Castlemaine. The crowd attended him to Tom Dance's door; and after his disappearance within, lingered to make their comments: giving praises to those good Grey Ladies who had received and succoured him.

"Now then," cried the doctor to his patient, when he had placed him comfortably in bed and seen him take some refreshment, no one being present but themselves, "what is the true history of this matter, Walter? I did not care to question you much before."

"The true history?" faltered Walter; who was not the best hand in the world at deception.

"What brought you in the chapel ruins, with a loaded pistol at that untoward time of night?"

"I wanted to shoot a sea-bird: them that come abroad at night," was the uneasy answer. "A gentleman at Stilborough gave me an order for one. He's a-going to get him stuffed."

Mr. Parker looked keenly at the speaker. He detected the uneasiness at being questioned.

"And you thought that hour of the morning and that *particular spot the best* to shoot the bird?" he asked.

"Them birds are always hovering about the ruins," spoke Walter, shifting his eyes in all directions. "Always a'most. One can only get at 'em at pitch-dark, when things are dead still."

"I thought, too, that birds were generally shot with guns, not pistols," said the surgeon; and the young man only groaned in answer: volunteering the explanation that his "arm gave him a twitch."

"Where did you get the pistol?"

"Father lent it to me," said Walter, apparently in much torment, "to shoot the bird."

"And how came the pistol to go off as it did?"

"I was raising it to shoot one, a big fellow he was, and my elbow knocked against that piece of sticking-out wall in the corner. Oh, doctor! I'm feeling rare and faint again."

Mr. Parker abandoned his investigation and went away whistling, taking in just as much as he liked of the story, and no more. There was evidently some mystery in the matter that he could not fathom.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ONE MORE INTERVIEW.

Mr. and Mrs. Bent were in their sitting-room, facing the sea, as many guests around them as the room could accommodate. Much excitement prevailed: every tongue was going.

Upon the occasion of an unusual commotion at Greylands, the Dolphin, being the only inn in the place, was naturally made the public rallying point, where expressions were freely given vent to and opinions exchanged.

Since the disappearance of Anthony Castlemaine, no event had occurred to excite the people like the accident to young Walter Dance. To the primitive community the one affair seemed almost as unaccountable as the other. The bare fact of the pistol's having gone off was not extraordinary; it might have happened to any one; the wonder lay in the attendant circumstances.

After the stir and bustle of seeing Walter Dance conveyed

from the Grey Nunnery to his home had somewhat subsided, the attendant spectators stayed a few minutes to digest the sight, and then moved off slowly by twos and threes to the Dolphin. The privileged amongst them went into Mr. and Mrs. Bent's room; the rest remained outside. Marvel the first was, that young Dance should have gone out to shoot a bird at that uncanny hour of the morning; marvel the second, that he should have chosen that haunted place, the chapel ruins, for no one had evinced more fear in a quiet way of the superstitions attending the Keep and the ghost that walked there than Walter Dance; marvel the third, that he should have taken a pistol to shoot at the sea-bird, instead of a gun.

"Why couldn't he have got the bird at eight or nine o'clock at night?" debated Ben Little, quite an old oracle in the village and the father of young Ben. "That's the best hour for sea-birds: nobody in their senses would wait till a'most dawn."

"And look here," cried Mrs. Bent, shrilly. "Why did he have a pistol with him? Tom Dance keeps a gun: he takes it out in his boat sometimes; but he keeps no pistol."

"Young Walter said in the night, to me and the doctor, that it was his father's pistol when we asked him about it," interposed John Bent.

"I know better," returned the landlady. "Tom Dance never owned a pistol yet. There's not a man in the whole place keeps a pistol."

"Except Mr. Superintendent Nettleby," put in old Ben.

"Nobody was bringing *him* in," retorted the landlady: "it's his business to keep a pistol. My husband, as you all know, thought it was a pistol he heard go off the night that young Mr. Castlemaine was missed, though the Commodore stood to it that it was his gun—and, as we said then, if it was a pistol, where did the pistol come from?"

"At any rate, it seems it *was* a pistol last night, wherever he might have got it from," said Ben Little. "And downright careless it must have been of him to let it go off in the way he says it did. It's to be known yet whether that's not a lame tale; invented to excuse himself."

Several faces were turned on old Ben Little at this. His drift was scarcely followed.

"Excuse himself from what?" demanded Mrs. Bent sharply.

"Do you suppose the young fellow would shoot himself purposely, Ben Little?"

"What I think," said Ben, calmly, "if one could come to the bottom of it, is this: that young fellow got a fright last night —saw the Grey Friar most probable; and his hand shook so that the pistol went off of itself."

This was so new a view of probabilities, that the room sank into temporary silence to revolve it. And not altogether an agreeable view. The Grey Friar did enough mischief as it was, in the matter of terrifying timid spirits: if it came to causing personal injuries with pistols, Greylands was at a pretty pass!

"Now I shouldn't wonder but that was it," cried John Bent, bringing down his hand on the table emphatically. "He saw the Grey Friar, or thought he did: and it put him into greater fright than mortal man could stand. You should just have seen him last night, and the terror he was in, when me and the doctor got to him—shaking the very board he lay upon."

"I'm sure he caused *us* fright enough," meekly interposed Sister Ann, who had drawn into the inn with the crowd. "When the Lady Superior, Sister Mary Ursula, came up to awake me and Sister Phœby, and we saw her trembling white face, and heard that Walter Dance had taken refuge at the Nunnery, shot, neither of us knew how we hurried our things on, to get down to him."

"Walter Dance don't like going nigh the Friar's Keep any more than the rest of us; and I can't think what should have took him there last night," spoke up young Mr. Pike from the general shop. "I was talking to him yesterday evening for a good half-hour if I was talking a minute; 'twas when I was shutting up: he said nothing then about going out to shoot a bird."

"But he must have went to shoot one," insisted Ben Little. "Why say he did it if he didn't? What else took him to the ruins at all?"

A fresh-comer appeared upon the scene at this juncture in the person of Mr. Harry Castlemaine. In passing the inn, he saw the signs of commotion going on, and turned in to see and hear. The various doubts and surmises, agitating the assembly, were freely poured into his ear.

"Oh, it's all right—that's what young Dance went up for," said he, speaking lightly. "A day or two ago I chanced to hear him say he wanted to shoot a sea-bird for stuffing."

"Well, sir, that may be it; no doubt it is, else why should he say it—as I've just asked," replied Ben Little. "But what we'd like to know is—why he should ha' stayed to the small hours of the morning before he went out. Why not have went just after dark?"

"He may have been busy," said Mr. Harry, carelessly. "Or out in the boat."

"He wasn't out in the boat last night, sir, for I was talking to him as late as nine o'clock at our door," said young Pike. "The boat couldn't have went out after that and come back again."

"Well, I don't think it concerns us whether he went out after this bird a little later or a little earlier," returned Harry Castlemaine. "The poor fellow has met with the accident; and that's quite enough for him without being worried with queries as to the precise half-hour it happened. It will be a lesson to him, I dare say, not to go out shooting birds in the dark again."

"Not to shoot 'em *there*, at any rate," rejoined Ben. "The conclusion we've just come to is this, Mr. Harry, sir: that the Grey Friar appeared to him and set him trembling, and the pistol went off of itself."

Mr. Harry's face grew long at once. "Poor fellow! it may have been so," he said: "and that alone would make his account a confused one. Well, my friends, the least we can do, as it seems to me, is to leave Walter Dance alone and not bother him," he continued, in conclusion: and out he went as grave as a judge. Evidently the Grey Friar was not sneered at by Mr. Harry Castlemaine.

Sitting in a quiet corner of the room was the Dolphin's guest, George North. Not a word spoken had escaped him. To every supposition, every remark, reasonable and unreasonable, he had listened attentively. For this affair had made more impression on him than the facts might seem to warrant: and in his own mind he could not help connecting this shot and this mysterious pistol with the shot of that past February night, that had been so fatal to his brother.

Fatal, at least, in the conviction of many at Greylands. Mr. North had never given in to the belief: he had put faith in Mr. Castlemaine: had persistently hoped that Anthony might still be living; that he would reappear some time and clear up the mystery. But an idea had now suddenly taken hold of him that this second shot would be found to be in some way connected with the other shot: and that the two might proceed from the Grey Friar. Not the ghost of a Grey Friar, but a living and substantial being, who might not wish to have his precincts invaded. We, who are in the secret of this later shot, can see how unfounded was the idea: but Mr. North was not in the secret, and it had taken (he knew not why) possession of him.

The talkers round about Mr. North all agreed, receiving their version of the affair from Sister Ann and John Bent, that Walter Dance's account was imperfect and confused; and that he was three parts beside himself with fear when he gave it. All food for Mr. George North: he put no faith in the young man's lame account, and discarded the idea that he had voluntarily gone into the dreaded ruins in the dead of night to shoot a bird: but he listened on, saying nothing.

When Harry Castlemaine quitted the Dolphin, he turned in the direction of Stilborough; he was going to walk there—which was nothing for his long legs. In ascending the hill past the church, a narrow and very lonely part of the road, the yew-trees overshadowing the churchyard on one side, the dark towering cliff on the other, he encountered Jane Hallet. She had been to Stilborough on some errand connected with her knitting, and was now returning. They met close to the churchyard-gate, and simultaneously stopped: as if to stop was a matter of course.

"Where have you been, Jane?" asked Mr. Harry.

"To Stilborough," she answered.

"You must have gone early."

"Yes, I went for wool"—holding up a brown-paper parcel in her hand.

"For wool!" he repeated, in somewhat annoyed tones. "I have told you not to worry yourself with any more of that unnecessary work, Jane."

"And make my aunt more displeased with me than she is

already," returned Jane, sadly. "I must keep on with it as long as I can, when in her sight."

"Well, I think you must have enough to do without that," he answered, yielding the point. "How pale you are, Jane."

"I am tired. It is a long walk, there and back, without resting. I sat down in one of the shops whilst they weighed the wool, but it was not very much of a rest."

"There again! I have told you the walk is too far. Why don't you attend to me, Jane?"

"I wish I could: but it is so difficult. You know what my aunt is."

"I am not sure, Jane, but it will be better to—to—" he stopped, seemingly intent on treading a stone into the path—"to make the change now," he went on, "and get the bother over. It must come, you know."

"Not yet; no need to do it yet," she quickly answered. "Let it be put off as long as possible. You don't know how I dread it."

"Yes, there it is: you are tormenting yourself into fiddle-strings. Don't be foolish, Jane. It is I who will have to bear the storm, not you: and my back's broad enough for that, I hope."

She sighed deeply: her pale, thoughtful, exceedingly pretty face was cast up in sad apprehension towards the blue autumn sky. A change came over its expression: some remembrance seemed suddenly to occur to her.

"Have you heard any news about Walter Dance?" she asked with animation. "As I came down the cliff this morning, Mrs. Bent was leaving the baker's with some hot rolls in her apron, and she crossed over to tell me that Walter had accidentally shot himself in the chapel ruins in the middle of the night. Is it true?"

"Shot himself instead of a sea-bird," slightingly responded Mr. Harry.

"And in the chapel ruins?"

"I hear he says so."

"But—that is not likely to be true, is it?"

"How should I know, Jane?"

She looked wistfully across the graveyard. Harry Castle-

maine whistled to a sparrow that was chirping on the branch of a yew-tree.

"Was it Mr. Nettleby who did it?" she presently inquired, in low, hesitating tones.

"Nettleby!" echoed Harry Castlemaine, in astonishment. "What in the world makes you ask that, Jane?"

A faint colour passed over her thin face, and she paused before answering.

"Mrs. Bent said she thought no one in the place possessed a pistol except Superintendent Nettleby."

He looked keenly at Jane: at her evident uneasiness. She was growing pale again; paler than before; with what looked like an unnatural pallor. Mr. Harry Castlemaine's brow knitted itself into lines, with the effort to fathom Jane's meaning.

"I don't like the chapel ruins: or the Friar's Keep," she went on, in the same low voice. "I wish no one ever went near them. I wish *you* would not go there!"

"Wish *I* would not go there!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean, Jane?"

"It may be your turn to be shot next," she said, with rising emotion.

"I cannot imagine what you are driving at," he answered, looking searchingly at the unmistakable agitation and anxiety of the thin, white face. "What have I to do with the chapel ruins? I don't go roaming about at night after sea-birds with a pistol."

"If you would only make a confidante of me!" she sighed.

"What have I to confide? If you will tell me what it is, perhaps I may do so. *I* don't know."

She glanced up at him, flushing again slightly. His countenance was unembarrassed, open, kindly in expression; but the decisive lips were set firmly. Whether he knew what she meant, or whether he did not, it was evident that he would not meet her in the slightest degree.

"Please do not be angry with me," faltered Jane.

"When am I ever angry with you? Simply, though, I do not understand you this morning, Jane. I think you must have overtired yourself."

"I am tired," she replied; "and I shall be glad to get home

to rest. My aunt, too, will be thinking it is time I had returned."

After another word or two, they parted: Jane going downhill, Harry Castlemaine upwards. Before he was quite out of sight, he stood to look back at her, and saw she had turned to gaze after him. A bright smile illumined his handsome face, and he waved his hand gaily. Few, very few, were so attractive as Harry Castlemaine.

Jane's lips parted with a farewell word, though he could not hear it, and her pretty dimples were all smiles as she went onwards. At the foot of the cliff she came upon little Bessy Gleeson in trouble. The child had fallen from a height, had cut both her knees, and was sobbing bitterly. Jane took the little thing up tenderly, soothed her, and then carried her up the cliff to the Gleesons' cottage. Between Bessy and the parcel, she could scarcely breathe when she got there. Exhausted, she dropped down on the stone by the door, her face whiter than ever.

"Where's mother?" she asked, as some of the little ones, Polly included, came running out.

But Nancy Gleeson had seen the ascent from the side window, and came forward, her hands all soap-suds. She was struck with Jane's exhausted look.

"Bessy has fallen down, Mrs. Gleeson. Her knees are bleeding."

"And how could you think of lugging her all up the cliff, Miss Jane! I declare you be as white as a sheet. A fat, heavy child like her! Fell down on your knees, have you, tiresome little monkey! One or another on you's always getting into mischief."

"It is a warm morning, and I have been walking to Stilborough and back," remarked Jane, as she rose to go on, and not choosing to be told she looked white without accounting for it. "Wash her knees with some hot water, please, Mrs. Gleeson: I dare say she is in pain, poor little thing."

"Lawk a me, Miss Jane," the woman called after her, "if you always had half-a-dozen of 'em about you you'd know better than to take notice o' such trifles as knees." But Jane was already nearly out of hearing.

Harry was not the only one of the Castlemaines who went that day to Stilborough. In the brightness of the afternoon, the close carriage of the Master of Greylands might have been seen bowling on its way thither, one lady, in the dress of the Grey Sisters, seated within it. A lady who was grand and noble, in spite of the simple attire—Mary Ursula.

She was about to pay a visit to that friend of hers on whom misfortune had fallen—Mrs. Ord. The double calamity—loss of husband and loss of fortune—reaching Mrs. Ord by the same mail, had thrown her upon a bed of sickness; and she was at all times delicate. The letter that Mary had sat up to write was despatched by a messenger early in the morning: and she had borrowed her uncle's close carriage to convey her on a personal visit.

The carriage left her at Mrs. Ord's house, and was directed to return for her in an hour; and Mary was shown up to the sick-chamber. It was a sad interview. This poor Mrs. Ord—whose woes, however, need not be entered upon here, as she has nothing to do with the story—was only a year or two older than Mary Ursula. They had been girls together. She was very ill now: and Mary felt that at this early stage little or no consolation could be offered. She herself had had her sorrows since they last met, and it was a trying hour for both of them. Before the hour had expired, Mary took her leave and went down to the drawing-room to wait for the carriage.

She had closed the door, and was half-way across the room, before she became aware that she was not alone. A gentleman rose from the depths of a lounging-chair at her approach. Every drop of blood in Mary's veins seemed to stand still, and then rush wildly on: her sight momentarily failed her, her senses were confused: and but that she had come so far, she might have retreated again. For it was William Blake-Gordon.

They stood facing each other for an instant in silence, both painfully agitated. Mary's grey bonnet was in her hand, for she had taken it off up-stairs; he held an open letter, that he had been apparently reading to pass away the time, while the servants carried his message to their mistress and brought back an answer. Mary saw the hand-writing and recognized it for Agatha Mountsorrel's. In his confusion, as he

hastily attempted to refold the letter, it escaped his hand, and fluttered to the ground. The other hand he was holding out to her.

She met it, scarcely perhaps conscious of what she did. He felt the trembling of the fingers; he saw the agitation of the wan white face. Not a word did either of them speak. Mary sat down on a sofa, he took a chair near her, after picking up his letter.

"This is a terrible calamity that has fallen on Mrs. Ord!" he exclaimed, seizing upon it as something to say.

"A double calamity," answered Mary.

"Yes indeed. Her husband dead, and her fortune gone! My father sent me here to inquire personally after her; to see her if possible. He and Colonel Ord were great friends."

"I do not think she can see you. She said that I was the one friend who would have been admitted to her."

"I did not expect she would see me: but my father made me come. You know his way."

She raised her hand and gently pushed from her temple the braids of her thick brown hair; as though, conscious of the whiteness of her face, she would fain cover it until the colour returned. Mr. Blake-Gordon, a very bad hand at deception at all times, suffered his feelings to get the better of conventionality.

"Oh, Mary! how like to the old days!" he cried impulsively. "To have you with me alone!—to be sitting once more together—you and I."

"Like them?" she returned sadly. "No. That can never be again."

"Would to Heaven it could!" he aspirated.

"A strange wish to hear from you now."

"And perhaps you think one I ought not to have spoken. Yet it is always in my heart, Mary."

"Then it ought not to be there."

"I see," he said. "You have been hearing rumours about me."

"I have heard one rumour. I presume it to be a true one. And I—I—" her lips were trembling grievously—"I wish you both happiness with all my heart."

Mr. Blake-Gordon pushed his chair back and began to pace

the room restlessly. At that moment a servant came in with a message from her mistress. He merely nodded a reply, and she went away again.

"Do you know what it has all been for me, Mary?" he asked, halting before her, his brow flushed, his manner as agitated as hers. "Do you guess what it is now? Every ray of sunshine went out of my life with you."

"At the time you—you may have thought so," she answered. "But why recall it? The sun has surely begun to shine for you again."

"Never in this world. Never will it shine as it did then."

"But that, in the face of facts, is scarcely credible," she rejoined, striving to be as calm and to speak as quietly as though Mr. Blake-Gordon had never been more to her than an acquaintance. "You are, I believe, about to"—she suddenly put her hand to her throat—"marry Agatha."

"It is true. At least, partially true."

"Partially?"

"For Heaven's sake, Mary, don't speak to me in that cold tone!" he passionately broke forth. "I cannot bear it from you."

"How would you have me speak?" she asked, rapidly regaining her self-possession; and her tones were certainly kind, rather than cold. "The past is over, you know, and circumstances have altogether changed. It will be better to meet them bravely: to regard them as they are."

"Yes, they are changed," he answered bitterly. "You have turned yourself into a lay-nun——"

"Scarcely that," she interrupted, with a smile.

"A Sister of Charity, then"—pointing to her grey dress. "And I, as the world says, am to marry Agatha Mountsorrel."

"But surely that is true?"

"It is true that I have asked her to be my wife. And she has accepted me. But, as to the marriage, I hope it may not take place for years. *I* shall never press it."

"You will both have my truest prayers for your happiness," rejoined Mary, her voice again slightly trembling. "Agatha will make you a good wife. The world calls her proud; but she will not be proud to her husband."

"It is not love that has caused me to address Agatha Mount-

sorrel——" he was beginning; but she interrupted him with decision.

"I would rather not hear this. It is not right of you to say it."

"I must say it. It is only a word or two; and I must have my way in this. It is in obedience to my father that I have addressed Miss Mountsorrel. Since the moment when you and I parted, he has never ceased to urge this upon me, to throw us together in every possible way. I resisted long; but my nature is weak and yielding—as you have reason to know—and at length I gave in. The world had set the rumour afloat long before I asked her to be my wife; but the world was in haste. And now that I have told you so much, I am thankful. I meant to make the opportunity of telling you had one not offered: for the worst pain of all, to me, would be that you should fancy I could love another."

The Greylands' chariot passed the window and drew up at the house. Mary rose.

"I hope with all my heart that you will love her as you once loved me," she said to him in a half-whisper, as she rang the bell and took up her bonnet. "To know that, William, will make my own life somewhat less lonely."

"Did you *ever* care for me?" broke from him.

"Yes. But the past is over for ever."

He stood in silence, watching her slender fingers as they trembled in tying the silk bonnet-strings. A servant appeared in answer to the ring. Mary was drawing on her gloves.

"The door," said Mr. Blake-Gordon.

"Good-bye," she said to him, holding out her hand.

He wrung it almost to pain. "You will allow me to see you to your carriage?"

She took the arm he held out to her and they went through the hall and down the steps together. The footman stood at the carriage-door, and he, her ex-lover, handed her into it. Not another word was spoken. The man sprang up to his place behind, and the chariot rolled away. For a full minute after its departure, William Blake-Gordon stood looking after it, forgetting, as it seemed, all other created things.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN THE MOONLIGHT.

Combined with Mr. Walter Dance's remorse for what he had betrayed to Miss Castlemaine when he thought the world was closing for him, was a wholesome dread of the consequences to himself. What his father's anger would be and what Mr. Castlemaine's punishment, when they learned all that his foolish tongue had said, Walter did not care to contemplate. As he lay that night in the Grey Nunnery after the surgeon's visit, Sister Ann watching by his pallet, he went through almost as much agony from this source as he had just gone through from the other. Whilst he believed his life in peril, that that mysterious part of him, the Soul, was about to be summoned to render up its account, earth and earth's interests were as nothing to him: utterly lost, indeed, beside that momentous hour which he thought was at hand. But, after the doctor had convinced him there was no danger, reassurance had set in, the worldly fear rose to the surface. Sister Ann thought that his starts and turns arose from bodily pain or restlessness: in point of fact it was his mind that was tormenting him and would not let him be still.

Of course it was no fault of his that Miss Castlemaine had found him in the cloistered vaults, or that there was a door that he never knew of opening into them, or a passage between them and the Grey Nunnery, or that the pistol had gone off and shot him. For all this he could not be blamed. But what he could, and would be blamed for was, that he had committed the astounding folly of betraying the secret relating to the Friar's Keep; for it might, so to say, destroy all connected with it. Hence his resolve to undo, so far as he could, the mischief by denying to Miss Castlemaine that his disclosure had any foundation in fact.

Believing that he had succeeded in this, when his morning interview with Sister Mary Ursula was over, he next began to ask himself why he need tell the truth at all, even to his father. The only thing to be accounted for was the shooting himself and turning up at the Grey Nunnery: but he might just as well

stand to the tale that he had told the doctor, to his father, as well as to the world: namely, that he had met with the injury in the chapel ruins, and had crawled to the Grey Nunnery for help.

This happy thought he carried out; and Tom Dance was no wiser than other people. When once deception is entered upon, the course is comparatively easy: "ce n'est que le premier pas qui coute," says the French proverb: and Mr. Walter Dance, truthful and honest though he loved to be, found himself quite an adept at invention before the first day was over.

Not that Tom Dance, wise in his all-but fifty years, took it all in unquestioningly. There was something about the story, and about Wally's voice and face and shifting eyes when he told it, that rather puzzled him: in short, that created a doubt: but the very impossibility (as he looked upon it) of the injuries having occurred in any other way partly dispelled suspicion. The idea that there was a secret passage from the Friar's Keep to the Grey Nunnery could no more have entered into Tom Dance's imagination, than that there was a passage to the moon.

When the bustle of the removal from the Grey Nunnery was over, and the numerous friends, admitted one at a time to see him, had departed, and Walter had had some refreshing sleep towards sunset, Tom Dance thought the time and opportunity had come to have a talk with him. The old grandmother, Dame Dance—who lived in her solitary abode under the cliff at some distance, and whose house at high-water was only accessible by boat—had come up to nurse him, bringing her white apron and a night-cap. But Tom Dance sent his mother home again. He was a good son, and he told her that she should not be troubled: he and Sarah could attend to Wally without further help. Sarah was his daughter, Walter's sister, and several years older than the young man. She was a cripple, poor thing, but very useful in the house; a shy, silent young woman, who only walked with crutches; so that Greylands scarcely saw her out-of-doors from year's end to year's end. Now and then, on some fine Sunday, she would contrive to get to church, but that was all.

Tom Dance's house was the last in the village and next the beach, its side windows facing the sea. It was twilight, but

there was no candle in Walter's room yet, and as Tom Dance sat down at the window, he saw the stars coming out over the grey waters, one by one, and heard the murmuring of the waves.

"D'ye feel that ye could eat a bit, Wally?" asked he, turning half towards the bed.

"Sarah's gone to make me some arrowroot, father."

"That's poor stuff, lad."

"It's what Dr. Parker said I was to have."

"Wally," continued Tom, after a pause, during which he had seemed to be looking out to sea again: "I can't make out what should have taken you up on to the chapel ruins. Why didn't you follow us to the Hutt?"

To account for this particular item in the tale, was Walter's chief difficulty. He knew that: and whilst his father was entering upon it in the morning, had felt truly thankful that they were interrupted.

"I don't know *what* took me," replied Walter, a sort of wonder in his voice, as though the fact as much puzzled himself as it could his father. "I stayed behind to lock up: and the rest of you had all gone on to the Hutt ever so long: and —and so I went up and out by the chapel ruins."

"One would think you must ha' been in a dream, lad."

"It's rare and lonely up that other long passage by one's self," hazarded Walter. "You are up at the chapel ruins and out that way in no time."

"Rare and lonely!" sharply retorted the older man. "Are you turning coward, lad?"

"Not I, father," warmly rejoined Walter, perceiving that this plea would not find favour. "Any way, I don't know what it was took me to go up to the chapel ruins. I went; and that seems to be all about it."

"It was unpardonably hazardous. Suppose you had been seen coming out o' the Keep at that time? And with a pistol!"

"I wish the pistol had been at the bottom o' the sea!" groaned the invalid.

"What did you take the pistol up for?—why didn't you leave it in the usual place with the other pistols?"

Walter groaned again. "I don't know."

"Tell ye what, lad: but that I know you b'ain't given to drink, I should say you'd got a drop of the crew's old Hollands inside you."

"Janson did offer me some," said young Walter, from under the bed-clothes.

"And you took it! Well, you must ha' been a fool. Why, your grandmother 'ud be fit to——"

"I wasn't drunk: don't think that, father," interrupted Walter, after a rapid mental controversy as to whether, of the two evils, it might not be better to confess to the Hollands—though, in point of fact, he had not touched a drop. "See here: it's no good talking about it, now it's done and over."

"And—if you did get out by way of the chapel ruins, what on earth made you go letting off the pistol there?"

"Well, it was an accident, that was: I didn't go to let it off. That wall in the corner knocked again' my elbow."

"What took you to the corner?"

"I thought I'd just give a look after the boats that were getting off," said Walter. "The beastly pistol went off somehow, and down I dropped."

"And of all things," continued the fisherman, "to think you should ha' knocked up the Grey Sisters! It must have been Hollands."

"I was bleeding to death, father. The Grey Nunnery is the nearest place."

"No, it's not. Nettleby's is the nearest."

"As if I should go *there!*" cried Walter, opening his eyes at the bare suggestion.

"And Teague's is as near as either. That's where you ought to have come on to."

"I—I—never thought of the Hutt," said poor Walter, wondering when this ordeal would be over.

"You hadn't got your head about you: that's what it was. Wally, lad, I'd a'most rather see you drowned in the sea some rough day afore my eyes, than see you take to drink."

"'Twasn't drink, 'twas the sight of the blood," returned Walter. "The Grey Ladies were rare and good to me, father."

"That don't excuse your having went there. In two or three minutes more you'd have reached home here – and we might ha'

kept it all quiet. As it is, every tongue in the place is wagging over it."

"Let 'em wag," suggested Walter. "They can't know anything."

"How do you know what they'll find out, with their prying and their wondering?" demanded the angry man. "Let 'em wag, indeed!"

"I could hardly get to the Nunnery," pleaded Walter. "I thought I was dying."

"There'll be a rare fuss about it with the Castlemaines! I know that. Every knock that has come to the door this blessed day I've took to be the Master o' Greylands, and shook in my shoes. A fine end you'll come to, if you go on like this, getting yourself and everybody else into trouble! George Hallet, poor fellow, would never have been such a fool."

Reproached on all sides, self-convicted of worse folly than his father had any idea of, weak in body and spirit, at his wits' end to ward off these home questions, Walter ended by bursting into a flood of tears. That disarmed Tom Dance; and he let the matter drop. Sarah limped in with the arrowroot, and close upon that Mr. Parker arrived.

The moon, wanting yet some days to the full, shone brightly down on the chapel ruins. Seated against the high wall of the Grey Nunnery was Mr. North, sketching the Friar's Keep by moonlight. The chapel ruins with its broken walls made the foreground: the half-ruined Keep, with its Gothic doorway, the background; to the right the sketch took in a bit of the sea. No doubt it would make a charming scene when done in water-colours, and one that must bear its own painful interest for George North.

He worked attentively and rapidly, his thoughts meanwhile as busy as his hands. The moon made it almost as light as day: though it cast darker shadows that would add to the effect of the sketch when finished.

About a week had passed since the accident to Walter Dance, and the young man was far on the road to recovery.

The occurrence had rarely been out of Mr. North's mind. He had taken the opportunity in an easy and natural way of calling in at Dance's to see the invalid, inquire after his

progress and condole with him. He had put a searching question or two regarding that past night's work, and had noticed the face flush, the eyes turn away, the answers become hesitating. But nothing more came of it: Walter was impenetrable: he departed unenlightened, but with his doubts strengthened.

As if to confirm his son's story, a day or two after the accident, Tom Dance, being in the company of some other fishermen at the time, and having his gun with him, aimed at a large sea-gull that came screaming over their heads, as they stood on the beach, and brought him down. The next morning, in the face and eyes of all Greylands, he went marching off with the dead bird to Stilborough, and left it with a naturalist to be stuffed: and pedestrians, passing the naturalist's shop, were regaled with a sight of the great bird exhibited there, its wings stretched out to the utmost.

All these matters, with the various speculations they brought in their train, were swaying Mr. North's mind, as he worked on this evening by mooonlight. The occurrence had certainly strengthened his intention of discovering Anthony's fate, rendering him more earnest in the pursuit. It could not be said that he was not earnest in it before; but there was nothing tangible to lay hold of. In point of fact, there was not anything now.

"Do you belong to me or do you not?" he soliloquized, glancing towards the distant chimneys of Greylands' Rest, his thoughts having turned on the Master of Greylands. "Failing poor Anthony, is the property mine? I would give much to know. My uncle seems too honourable to keep what is not his own: and yet—why did he not prove to Anthony that the estate was his own?—why does he not prove it now?—for he must know how people talk, and the doubts that are cast on him. I cannot tell what to think. Personally, I like him——"

A sudden shadow fell on Mr. North's book, and made him look up abruptly. It was caused by a cloud passing over the moon. A succession of light clouds came sailing quickly up from the sea, obscuring for a time the moon's silvery light. Mr. North's sketch was, however, nearly done; and a few quick strokes completed it.

Putting it into his portfolio, he rose, took a look out over

the sea, and passed into the Friar's Keep. Many a time, by night or by day, since his first arrival at Greylands, had he gone stealthily into the place; but had never found anything to reward him. Silent and deserted as ever, were they now: and George North was on the point of turning out again, when the sound of light footsteps smote on his ear, and he drew back into a dark corner within the entrance.

Darkening the moonlight at the entrance, came a woman's figure, entering far more stealthily and softly than Mr. North had entered. She stole along between the pillars, and then stopped suddenly, as though intent on listening. She was not quite beyond the vision of Mr. North: and he saw her put back her hood and bend her ear to listen. Quite two minutes passed thus: they seemed like five to George North, standing still and motionless as the grave. Then she turned, retraced her steps, and went out again. Mr. North stole to the door in her wake, and looked after her.

Yes, he thought so! It was Jane Hallet. She had gone to the edge now, and was gazing straight out to seaward, her hands raised over her eyes. Being about himself of an evening, he had seen her about also; had seen her more than once come to these ruins and stand as she was standing now: but only once before had she entered the Keep. The precise purport of these manœuvres he could not fathom, but felt sure that she was tracking, and yet hiding from, Harry Castlemaine. Another minute, and then she turned.

"Not to-night," Mr. North heard her say to herself as she passed the door of the Keep. And she went through the gate and walked rapidly away towards Greylands.

Mr. North took out his watch. Half-past nine. Not too late, he decided, to go to Greylands' Rest and pay a short visit to Madame Guise. The Castlemaines were out that evening, dining at Stilborough—information he had picked up from Mrs. Bent: had they been at home, he would not have thought of presenting himself so late. It might be a good opportunity to get a few minutes alone with his sister-in-law, and he wanted to tell her that he had heard from Gap.

Crossing the road, he went striding quickly up the lane, and was nearly run over by Commodore Teague's spring-cart, which shot unexpectedly out of the turning. The Commodore, who

was driving, did not see him: for his head was bent down, doing something to the harness. The cart clattered on, and Mr. North pursued his way.

Turning in at the gate of Greylands' Rest, and passing round to the broad path, he heard a voice singing; a voice that he knew and loved too well. Ethel had not gone to Stilborough, then! She sat alone at the piano in the red room, its glass-doors thrown wide, singing a love ditty to herself in the moonlight. Mr. North, every pulse of his heart beating, drew himself up against the wall beside the window to listen.

Ethel had a sweet voice and sang well; and Mr. George North, as he stood against the wall outside, wished she would go on for ever.

But all too soon Ethel left the piano and came to the window, her bright face, raised to look at the moon, glowing with a sweet, hopeful expression that seemed to tell of love.

George North went forward, and Ethel was startled.

"Oh, Mr. North!" she exclaimed. "How you frightened me!"

He took her hand—both hands—in his contrition, explaining that he waited there until she had finished her song, not to enter and disturb it. "But I thought you were gone out to dinner," he added.

"No, I was not invited. Only papa and mamma and Harry."

"Or of course I should not have attempted to intrude so late as this. I thought, believing Madame Guise to be alone, that it would be a good opportunity to see her. I suppose she is at home."

"Oh yes; she will be glad to see you," replied Ethel, her heart beating wildly with its love and his presence. "Flora is very troublesome to-night, and madame has had to go up to her. She will soon be back again."

Very troublesome indeed. The young lady, taking the advantage of Mr. and Mrs. Castlemaine's absence, had chosen to go into one of her wildest moods and promenade the house en robe de nuit. At this present moment she was setting madame at defiance at the top of one of the staircases.

George North had stepped into the room, and they were standing side by side at the open window in the moonlight, each perfectly conscious of what the companionship was to the

other. He began telling her where he had been; and opened his sketch-book to show her the drawing.

"Sitting in the chapel ruins alone by moonlight!" exclaimed Ethel. "It is clear that you are not a native of Greylands, Mr. North. I doubt whether any other man in the place would do it."

"I am not a simple fisherman, Ethel," he laughed. He had called her "Ethel" for some time now, led insensibly to it by the example of others at Greylands' Rest.

"I was not thinking altogether of the fishermen. I don't fancy even Harry Castlemaine would do it."

"No?" said Mr. North, an amused smile lingering on his lips.

"At least, I have heard him, more than once, express a dislike to the place; that is, of going there—if he had to do such a thing—after dark. Did you see anything?"

"Only——" Mr. North suddenly arrested his words. He had been about to say, Jane Hallet. Various reasons prompted him to close his lips on the point to Miss Reene.

"Only shadows," he continued, turning the phrase. "The moon went under a cloud now and then. It is a most beautiful night out at sea."

Her slender fingers were trembling with sweet emotion as she held one side of the sketch-book. Not a word of his love had Mr. North ever said to her; not a word could he say to her under present circumstances; but Ethel felt that it was hers for all time. Fate might part them in this life; each, it was possible, might marry another; but he would never love another as he loved her.

"How exact it is!" she cried, looking at the page, which the clear moonlight fell upon. "I should know it anywhere. You have even got that one little dark stone in the middle of the wall that seems to have been put in after the other stones, and is so unlike them."

"I made it conspicuously darker that it might guide me in painting," he answered. "It will make a good picture."

"Shall you be going over to France again?" Ethel asked after a silence.

"Undoubtedly. In a letter I received this morning from some of my friends there, they inquire when it is to be. I am

lingering here too long, they think. It was to tell Madame Guise I had heard, for she knows them, that I came here so late."

"You—you said one day, I remember, that you might probably settle in France," resumed Ethel. "Shall you do so?"

"It is quite uncertain. If things turn out as—as they ought to, I should settle in England. Probably somewhere in this neighbourhood."

Their eyes met. Mingled with the passionate love, in each gaze, was an expression of deep sadness.

"Circumstances at present are so very doubtful," resumed Mr. North. "They may turn out well; or very badly——"

"Badly!" involuntarily interrupted Ethel.

"Yes."

The answer was given in marked, decisive tones. For the doubt that had much disturbed his mind lately was this: If it should indeed prove that the Master of Greylands had dealt ill with Anthony, George North could scarcely bring himself to marry one so closely connected with Greylands' Rest as Ethel.

"And—in that case?" she continued, after a pause, during which he seemed to have been lost in thought.

"In that case? Oh, I should become a wandering Arab again, roaming the world at large."

"And settle eventually in France?"

"Very likely—if I settled anywhere. It is all so uncertain, Ethel, that I scarcely care to glance at it. I may possess property in England some time: and that might necessitate my living there."

"Do you mean an estate? Such as this?"

"Yes, such as this," he answered, with a curious smile. "Meanwhile I am so happy in the present that I fear I am too willing to forget the future care which may come."

Not another word did either speak: the silence, with its pleasure and pain, was all too eloquent. The sketch-book was held between them: and they stood looking out upon the night.

"Why, you are quite in the dark, my dear! Why—dear me! who is it?"

They turned at the voice—that of Madame Guise. She had just left Miss Flora.

"Not in the dark, but in the moonlight," said Mr. North, holding out his hand.

"I did not know you were here," she answered. "It is late."

"Very late: I hope you will forgive me. But I have been here some little time. I was taking a sketch by moonlight not far off, and came on, Madame Guise, to say Good-day, thinking you were alone."

"It is Good-night, I think," returned madame, with a pleasant laugh, as she rang for lights. "Will you take a chair?"

"Thank you, no," he replied, putting the sketch-book into the portfolio. "I will take my departure instead, and call again to-morrow at a more seasonable hour. Good-night to you, Miss Ethel."

Ethel put her hand into his and returned his farewell in low tones. Madame Guise, as she often did, stepped across the threshold to walk to the gate with him.

"Did you want anything in particular with me, George?" she asked in French, waiting until they were beyond hearing —lest the walls should possess ears.

"Only to tell you that I had a letter from Emma this morning. I should not have come up so late, but for believing the family were all out."

"What does Emma say?"

"Not much. Emma never does, you know. She sends some kind messages to you and a kiss to Marie: and she asks how much longer I mean to linger at Greylands. That is about all."

"But does she ask nothing about Anthony?"

"She asks in a general way whether we know more yet. Which of course we do not."

"Have you made anything out of that young Dance, George?"

"Nothing. There's nothing to be made out of him. Except that I feel convinced the tale he tells is *not* all true. I was in the Friar's Keep to-night——"

"And saw nothing?" she eagerly interrupted.

"Nothing. It was dark and silent and lonely as usual. Sometimes I ask myself what it is that I can reasonably expect to see."

"Yes, I know; you have thought that from the first," she

said reproachfully. *My* brain is at work always: I have no rest night or day."

"Which is bad for you, Charlotte: it is wearing you out. This living, restless anxiety will not bring light any the surer or quicker."

"Oh, it will. Will my prayers and my anguish not be heard, think you? God is good."

They parted with the last words. Charlotte Guise, leaning on the side-gate as she looked after him, raised her eyes to the blue canopy of heaven: and there and then, in her simple faith, poured forth a few words of supplication.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CALLING IN THE BLACKSMITH.

THINGS were coming to a crisis in Miss Hallet's house, though that lady was very far from suspecting it. Time had again gone on since the last chapter, and Walter Dance was about again.

After the evening that witnessed Miss Hallet's fright at the vision of the Grey Friar, she had been very ill. Whether it was terror, or mortification at having betrayed it, or simply the fall in the road, certain it was that she had a somewhat long illness, and was attended by Mr. Parker. No one could be more attentive to her than Jane; and Miss Hallet was willing to forget that the girl had given cause for complaint. But Miss Hallet found, now that she was well again, that the cause still existed: at all sorts of unseasonably late hours Jane would be abroad. Scarcely an evening passed but Jane would make an excuse for going out. She had taken lately to going more to Stilborough, often without assigning any reason for doing so. The hour at which she would return was uncertain; sometimes it was after ten—a very unhallowed hour in the estimation of her sober aunt. One night she had remained out till one o'clock in the morning, sending Miss Hallet into a perfect fever of anger and suspense. She ran in, panting with the haste she had made up the cliff, and looked worn and haggard. Miss Hallet met her with harsh words: Jane re-

sponded by a burst of tears, declaring in tones that her aunt could scarcely discredit, that she had only been "looking at the sea" and looking at it *alone*.

From that evening, Miss Hallet had taken to watching Jane as a subject of curiosity. Jane was growing nervous. More than once when Miss Hallet had gone upstairs and surprised Jane in her bedroom—for that lady, since her illness, had walked about in list shoes, for comfort, not to come upon people unawares—she had found Jane standing over a certain open drawer. Jane would shut it hastily and lock it with trembling fingers, and marks of unmistakable agitation. Jane had never been nervous in her life, reasoned Miss Hallet: why should she be so now? Her eyes had an habitually sad look in them, something like that of a hunted hare; her face was worn and thin. The sudden appearance of any one at the door or window would make Jane start and turn pale: she could eat nothing, and would often be so absorbed in thought as to give answers that had no bearing upon the question. Altogether, taking one thing with another, Miss Hallet came to the conclusion that there was some mystery about Jane, just as certain other personages of our story decided there was mystery in the Friar's Keep.

The matter troubled Miss Hallet. She knew not what to do, to whom to speak, or of whom to ask advice. Speaking to Jane herself was useless: for the girl invariably denied that anything was wrong or that she was different from what she always had been. It was now that Miss Hallet felt her isolated position, and the reserve with which she had treated the village.

Her own illness had left her somewhat less strong-minded than before, or she would never have spoken of it. One day, however, when Mrs. Bent came up to pay a social visit, and Jane had gone down the cliff on some necessary errand, Miss Hallet, who had been "tried" that morning by Jane's having an hysterical fit, condescended to speak of Harry Castlemaine in connection with her niece, and to ask Mrs. Bent whether she ever saw them together now.

"Pretty nearly every other evening," was the most unwelcome answer.

Miss Hallet coughed, to cover a groan of censure. "Where do they walk to?" she asked.

"Mostly under the high cliff towards the Limpets. It's lonely there at night—nobody to be met with, ever."

"Do you walk there—that you should see them?" asked keen Miss Hallet.

"To tell you the truth, I have gone there on purpose to see," was the landlady's unblushing answer. "I don't approve of it. It's very foolish of Jane."

"Foolish; yes, very: but Jane would never behave lightly," returned Miss Hallet, a blush of resentment on her thin cheeks.

"I don't say she would: Jane ought to have better sense than that. But it is pretty nigh as bad to give rise to talk," added straightforward Mrs. Bent: "many a good name has been tarnished for less cause. It's not nice news, either, to be carried up to Greylands' Rest."

"Is it carried there, Mrs. Bent?"

"Not yet, that I know of. But it will be one of these days. I should put a stop to it, Miss Hallet."

"Yes, yes," said the unfortunate lady, smoothing her mittened hands together nervously, as she inwardly wondered how that was to be done, with Jane in her present temper. And, perplexed with her many difficulties, she began enlarging upon Jane's new and strange moods, even mentioning the locked drawer she had surprised Jane at, and openly wondering what she kept in it.

"Love-letters," curtly observed discerning Mrs. Bent.

"Love-letters!" ejaculated Miss Hallet, who had never had a love-letter in her life, and looked upon them as no better than slow poison.

"There's not a doubt of it. His. I dare say he has a lot of Jane's. I gave her a bit of my mind the day before yesterday, when she came to the inn to bring back the newspaper," added Mrs. Bent. "Gave it plainly, too."

"And—how did Jane receive it?"

"As meek as a lamb. 'I am not the imprudent girl you appear to think me, Mrs. Bent,' says she, with her cheeks as red as a beetroot. 'Mr. Harry Castlemaine would not like to hear you say this,' she went on. 'Mr. Harry Castlemaine might lump it,' I answered. 'It wouldn't affect him much any way, I expect. Mr. Harry Castlemaine might set the sea afire with a trolly of tar-barrels if he so minded, and folks would just

wink at him; while you would have the place about your ears if you dropped in but half a thimbleful.' Jane wished me good-morning at that, and took her departure."

Mrs. Bent's visit ended with this. Upon her departure, Miss Hallet put on her shawl and bonnet and proceeded to take her daily walk outside the door in the sun, pacing the narrow path. After Mrs. Bent's information, she could no longer doubt that Jane's changed mood must be owing to this acquaintanceship with Mr. Harry Castlemaine. A love-affair, of course;—girls were so idiotic!—and Jane's trouble must arise from the knowledge that it could end in nothing.

"Jane must have lost her head!" soliloquized the angry lady, her face stern. "She must know it cannot come to anything. They stand as far apart as the poles. Our family was good in the old days; as good perhaps as the Castlemaines; but things altered with us. And I went out as lady's-maid, for it was more that than companion, and they know it, and I dare say place me, in their thoughts, on a level with their own servants. Mr. Castlemaine is polite when he meets me, bows, and sometimes stays to chat for a minute: but he would no more think my niece a fitting wife for his son than he would think the poorest fisherman's girl in the place fitting. Jane must have lost her senses!"

Miss Hallet stopped to draw her shawl more closely round her, for the wind was brisk to-day; and then resumed her promenade and her reflections.

"Rather than the folly should continue, I would go to the Master of Greylands, and tell him all. He would pretty soon stop it. And I *will* do it, if I can make no impression on Jane. I should like to know, though, before speaking, what footing they are upon: whether it is only a foolish fancy for each other, meaning nothing, or whether she considers it more serious. He cannot have been so dishonourable as to say anything about marriage! At least, I—I hope not. He might as well offer her the stars: and Jane ought to know there's as much chance of the one as the other. I wonder what is in the love-letters?"

Miss Hallet took a turn or two, revolving this one point. A wish crossed her that she could read the letters. She wished it not for curiosity's sake: in truth, she would not have touched them willingly with a pair of tongs: but that their contents

might guide her future conduct. If the letters really contained nothing but nonsense she might deal with the matter with Jane alone: but if Mr. Harry had been so absurd as to fill her up with ideas of marriage, why then she would carry the affair up to Greylands' Rest, and leave it to be dealt with by its master.

Entering the house, she went upstairs. It was not likely that Jane had left the drawer unlocked; still it might have happened from inadvertence. But no. Miss Hallet stood in Jane's room and pulled at the drawer in question, the first long drawer in the chest. It resisted her efforts. Taking her own keys from her pocket, she tried every one of them, but none would fit. Nevertheless, she determined to get those letters at the first opportunity, believing it to lie in her duty. Not a shadow of doubt arose in her mind, as to Mrs. Bent's theory: she was as sure the drawer contained Harry Castlemaine's love-letters, as though she had it open and saw them lying before her. Love-letters, and nothing else. What else should Jane care to conceal?

"Jane's instincts are those of a lady," thought Miss Hallet, looking round the neat room approvingly: admiring the pretty taste displayed, the little ornaments on the muslin-draped dressing-table. "Yes, they are. And there's her Bible and Prayer-book on their own stand; and—dear me! where on earth did *these* come from?"

She had caught sight of a glass of hot-house flowers. Not many. Half-a-dozen or so; but they were fresh, and of rare excellence.

"Jane must have brought them in last night. Smuggled them in, I should say, for I saw none in her hand. It is easy to know where they came from: there's only one hot-house in the whole place, and that's at Greylands' Rest."

Miss Hallet went down more vexed than she had come up. She was very precise and strait-laced: no one could deny that: but here was surely enough food to disturb her. Just after she had resumed her walk outside, her mind running upon how she could best contrive to get at the love-letters, Jane appeared.

Slowly and wearily was she ascending the cliff, as if she could hardly put one foot before the other. Miss Hallet could only notice it. Her face was pale; the head was bent.

"You look tired to death, Jane! What have you been doing to fatigue yourself like that?"

Jane started at the salutation, lifted her head, and saw her aunt. As if by magic, her listless manner changed, and she ran up the remaining bit of path briskly. Her pale face was quite in a glow when she reached Miss Hallet.

"I am not tired, aunt. I was only thinking."

"Thinking of what?" returned Miss Hallet. "You looked and walked as though you were tired: that's all I know."

"Of something Susan Pike has just told me," laughed Jane. "It might have turned out to be no laughing matter, though. Jack Tuff has taken a drop too much this morning and fallen out of a little boat he got into. Susan says he came up the beach like a drowned rat."

Jane went into the house, and put down the basket she was carrying. Miss Hallet followed her.

"I could only get the scrag end this morning, aunt: the best end was sold. So it must be boiled. And there's the newspaper, aunt: Mrs. Bent ran across to me with it."

"Put it on at once, then, with a sliced carrot or two," said Miss Hallet, alluding to the meat.

"And bacon," resumed Jane, "it is a halfpenny a pound dearer. I think, aunt, it would be well to buy a good-sized piece of bacon at Stilborough. I am sure we give Pike a penny a pound more than we should pay there."

"Well—yes—it might be," acknowledged Miss Hallet for once: who very rarely listened to suggestions.

"I could bring it back this afternoon," observed Jane.

"What should take you to Stilborough this afternoon, pray?"

"I want to take the socks in. And you know, aunt—I told you—that Mrs. Pugh asked me to go to tea there one day this week: I may as well stay with her to-day."

Jane had expected no end of opposition; but Miss Hallet made none. She went out to her walk again without further remark, leaving Jane to the household duties. It turned out that Susan Pike was going to Stilborough, being also invited to Mrs. Pugh's. Jane mentioned it to her aunt at dinner, but Miss Hallet answered nothing.

About four o'clock, that damsel, attired in all the colours of

the rainbow, came running up the cliff for Jane. Jane, dressed neatly, and looking as nice as usual, was ready for her; and they started together, Jane carrying her paper of socks and an umbrella.

"Well I never, Jane! you are not a-going to take that big umberella, are you?" cried Miss Susan, halting at the threshold, and putting up a striped parasol the size of a dinner-plate.

"I am not sure about the weather," returned Jane, looking at the sky. "I should not like to get wet. What do you think about it, aunt?"

"I think it likely to rain before you are back again: and you will either take the umbrella, Jane, or you will change that best bonnet for your old one. What is the matter with the umbrella? It will not discredit anyone."

Susan shrugged her shoulders when they were out of sight; and Miss Hallet wondered for the hundredth time at Jane's making a companion of that common, illiterate girl.

She sat down to read the newspaper after they were gone, took her tea, and at dusk put on her things to go down the cliff. It was a very dull evening, dark before its time: heavy clouds covered the sky. In a remote angle of the village lived the blacksmith, one Joe Brown; a small, silent, sooty sort of man in a leather apron, who might be seen at his forge from morning till night. He was there now, hammering at a piece of iron, as Miss Hallet entered.

"Good-evening, Brown."

Brown looked up at the address, and discerned who the speaker was by the red glare of his fire. He touched his hair in answer, and gave her back a good-evening.

She told him at once what she wanted, putting her veil up to speak. The key of a drawer had been mislaid in her house, and she wished Brown to come and open it.

"Unlock him, or pick him, mum?" asked Brown.

"Only unlock it."

"Won't the morrow do, mum? I'm over-busy to-night."

"No, to-morrow will not do," replied Miss Hallet, in one of those decisive tones that carry weight with them. "I want it opened to-night, and you must come at once. I shall pay you well."

So the man yielded: saying that in five minutes he would leave his forge, and be up the cliff almost as soon as she was. He kept his word: and Miss Hallet had only just removed her things when he arrived, carrying a huge bunch of keys of various sizes. It was beginning to rain. Not infrequently was he called out on a similar errand, and would take with him either these keys, or instruments for picking a lock, as might be required.

She led the way to Jane's room, and pointed out the drawer. Brown stooped to look at the lock, and at the second trial, put in a key that turned easily. He drew the drawer a little open. Nothing was to be seen but a large sheet of white paper, covering the drawer half-way up. The contents, whatever they might be, were under it.

"Thank you," said Miss Hallet, closing the drawer again, whilst he took the key off the bunch at her request, to lend her until the morning. "Don't mention this little matter, Brown, will you be so good," she added, handing the man a shilling. "I do not care that my niece or the neighbours should think me careless with my keys." And he readily promised.

The rain was now coming down in torrents. Miss Hallet stood at the front-door with the man, really sorry that he should have to go through such a deluge.

"It ain't nothing, mum," he said. And, taking his leather apron off to throw over his shoulders, Brown went swinging away.

As the echo of his footsteps, descending the cliff, died away on her ear, Miss Hallet slipped the bolt of the house-door, and went upstairs again. Putting the candle down on the white covering; for Miss Hallet and Jane had toilette covers in their rooms as well as their betters; she opened the drawer again. If the sheet of white paper covered only love-letters, there must be an astonishing number of them: the colour flew into Miss Hallet's cheeks as an idea dawned upon her that there might be presents besides.

She drew a chair forward, and placed the candle close to the edge of the drawers, preparing herself for a long sitting. Not a single letter would she leave unread: no, nor a single word in any one of them. She was safe for two good hours, for Jane was not likely to be in before nine: it might not be as soon as

that, if the two girls waited at Stilborough for the storm to cease.

Setting her spectacles on her nose, Miss Hallet lifted the white paper from the contents of the drawer; and then sat gazing in surprise. There were no love-letters; no letters of any sort. The bottom of the drawer was lined with some delicate-looking articles, that she at first took to be dolls' clothes. Pretty little cambric caps, their borders crimped with a silver knife by Jane's deft fingers; miniature frocks; small bed-gowns—and so on.

"Why, what on earth!"—began Miss Hallet, after a prolonged perplexity: and in her astonishment, she gingerly took up one of the little caps and turned it about in her hands.

All in a moment, with a rush and a whirl; a rush of dread in her heart, a whirl of dreadful confusion in her brain; the truth came to the unfortunate lady. She staggered a step or two back to the chair, and dropped down on it, faint and sick. The appearance of the Grey Friar had brought most grievous terror to her; but it had not brought such awful dismay as this.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MISS JANE IN TROUBLE.

THE Grey Ladies held fête sometimes, as well as the outside world; and it was gay this evening in the Grey Nunnery. The Sisters were en soirée: no guests, however, were present; they were alone. The occasion was the return of Sister Mildred: Sister Mildred grown young again, as she laughingly told them, so sprightly did she feel in her renewed health and strength.

She had brought back some treasures with her: contributed by the relatives with whom she had been staying. A basket of luscious hot-house grapes; a rich, home-made plum-cake; and two bottles of cowslip wine. These good things had been set out on the parlour-table, and the Ladies sat round, listening to Sister Mildred's glowing accounts of her visit.

"You will be sorry, now, that you have resigned the com-

mand to me," whispered Mary Ursula, speaking into the ear-trumpet. "I will restore it to you."

"Ah, my dear, no. I would not be at the head again for the world. I am better, as you see, thanks to our merciful Father in heaven; but to keep well I must have no care or trouble. I shall be of less use here now than any of you."

"You will be of every use, dear Sister Mildred, if only with your counsel," returned Mary.

"It is very pleasant to be at home again," resumed the elder lady, her face beaming under its crisp muslin cap. "The sojourn with my relatives has been very delightful; but, after all, there's no place like home. And you must give me an account of all that has occurred during my absence."

"There's not very much to relate, I think," observed Sister Betsy. "We had an adventure here, though, one night. Tom Dance's son went on to the chapel ruins to shoot a sea-bird, and his pistol exploded, and wounded him dreadfully. He came crawling here to be taken in, and——"

But Sister Betsy's explanation was cut short by a loud, peremptory ring at the house-bell. Rings at that time of the evening, for it was nearly nine o'clock, generally announced illness or accident. Sister Ann hastened to the door.

"Who is ill?" quickly demanded Sister Mildred, on her return.

"Not any one," replied Sister Ann, as she approached Mary Ursula. "It is a visitor for you, madam."

"For me!" exclaimed Mary, surprised. "Is it Mr. Castlemaine?"

"It is Lawyer Knivett, from Stilborough," said Sister Ann. "His business is very particular, he says. I have taken him to the dining-room."

Mary Ursula rose at once. Cold and bare looked the room as she entered, lighted by its solitary candle. Mr. Knivett came forward and held out his hand.

"Will you forgive my disturbing you at this time, my dear Miss Castlemaine?" he asked. "I should have been here an hour or two ago; but first of all I waited for the violence of the storm to pass; and then, just as I was getting into my gig, a client came up from a distance, and insisted on an interview.

Had I put off coming until to-morrow morning, it might have been midday before I arrived here."

They sat down as he spoke. He drew a chair close to Mary's; and she wondered what his visit could relate to.

"My dear lady, I am the bearer of sad news," he began. "People have said, you know, that a lawyer is like a magpie, a bird of ill-omen."

Mary's heart suddenly stood still. Had something come to light about Anthony?

"It concerns your father's old friend and clerk, Thomas Hill," went on Mr. Knivett. "He was your friend also."

"Is he ill?" cried Mary.

"He *was* ill, my dear Miss Castlemaine."

The stress was so peculiar that the inference seemed all too plain. Mary rose in agitation.

"Surely—surely he is not dead?"

"Sit down, my dear young lady. I know how grieved you will be; but agitation will not do any good. He died this afternoon at five o'clock."

There ensued a silence. "And—I—was not sent for to him," cried Mary, greatly agitated.

"There was no time to send," replied Mr. Knivett. "He had been ailing for several days past, but the doctor—it was Tillotson—said it was nothing; poor Hill himself thought so. This afternoon a change for the worse occurred, and I was sent for. There was no time for anything."

She pushed back the brown hair, braided so simply under the muslin cap. Past memories were crowding upon her, mixing themselves up with present pain. The last time she had seen the surgeon, Tillotson, was the night when her father was found dead on his sofa, and poor Thomas Hill was mourning over him.

"Hill said more than once to me that he should not last long now his master was gone," resumed the lawyer: "but I thought it was only an old man's talk, grieving after his many years' friend. He was right, however."

Regrets were stealing upon Mary. She had not, she thought, taken as much notice of this faithful old man as she might have done. Why, oh, why, in that one sole visit she had made to Stilborough, to Mrs. Ord, did she not call to see him?

"And I should not have hastened over here to tell you this alone, Miss Castlemaine; you would have heard it soon without that; ill news travels fast. But nothing can be done without your sanction. You are left sole executrix."

"I!" exclaimed Mary Ursula, the tears in her eyes overflowing.

"Yes. His will does not contain ten lines, I think, for I made it; and there's not a name mentioned in it but yours. Every stick and stone is left to you; and full power in all ways."

"But what shall I do, Mr. Knivett? How could he leave me executrix!"

"My dear young lady, I knew you would be distressed at the first aspect of the thing. I was surprised when he gave me the directions; but he would have it so. He had an idea, I fancy, that it might take you away from this place: he did not like your being here."

"I know it. I tried to convince him that I was happy when he came over here in the summer; but he could not think it."

"Just so. His money is well invested, and will bring you in about three hundred and fifty pounds a-year. He has left you everything, even to his knicknacks."

"What a good, faithful man he was!" she cried. "Good in every relation of life. He has gone to his reward."

"Ay," nodded Mr. Knivett. "Hill was better than a good many of his neighbours."

"But I can never act," she exclaimed. "I should not know what to do, or how to do it."

"My dear, you need not trouble yourself on that score. Give me power, and I will act for you. Not for reward," he added impressively: "I must do this little matter for friendship's sake. Nay, my dear, you must meet this as it is meant: remember my long friendship with your father."

"You are very kind," she faltered.

"Have you a pen and ink at hand?"

She brought one, and he caused her to assign him the necessary power. Then he asked her wishes as to temporary matters, and they consulted for a few minutes together: but she was glad to leave all as far as possible to Mr. Knivett's judgment and discretion.

"There has been another death at Stilborough to-day: at least, not more than a mile or two from it," observed the lawyer, as he rose to leave. "You have not heard of it, I suppose?"

He had turned away from her and was taking up his overcoat which lay on a form. Mary replied that she had not heard anything.

"Sir Richard Blake-Gordon is dead."

Mary's heart suddenly stood still, and then went bounding on again.

"His death was very sudden," continued the lawyer, still occupied with his coat. "He was taken with a fit and never spoke again. Never recovered consciousness, Sir William tells me."

Mary lifted her eyes. Mr. Knivett had turned to her then.

"Sir—William?" she stammered, feeling altogether confused. The title sounded strange to her; unnatural.

"It was he who came in and detained me: he had to see me upon an urgent matter. He is sadly cut up."

Hardly giving himself time to shake hands, Mr. Knivett hurried away. In passing the parlour-door, Sister Mildred was coming out of it. She and the lawyer were great friends, although they seldom saw each other. He could not stay longer then, he said; and she and Mary went with him to the door, and walked with him across the waste ground to the gate.

The storm had quite passed: it was the same evening as that recorded in the last chapter, when Miss Hallet took a trip to the blacksmith's: the sky was clear again and bright with a few stars. The storm had been one of those violent ones when the rain seems to descend in pitiless torrents. Quite a channel of water was streaming in front of the Grey Nunnery. Mr. Knivett's horse and gig waited in the road. The night was warm and still, balmy almost as summer, though it was getting late in the year. Ten o'clock was striking from the Nunnery clock. The two ladies stood at the gate and watched him drive away.

They were standing watching the beauty of the night, Mary full of her own sad thoughts, when sounds, as of fleet footsteps, dawned on her ear. A minute before, a figure might have been seen flying down the cliffs from the direction of Miss Hallet's dwelling; a panting, sobbing woman. She darted

across the lonely road, and made for the path that would take her by the Grey Nunnery. The ladies turned to her as she came into view. It looked like Jane Hallet. Jane, in her best things, too. She seemed in desperate distress: and not until she was flying past the gate did she see the ladies standing there. Sister Mildred glided out of the gateway to arrest and question her.

"Jane, what is the matter?"

Startled at the sight of the ladies, Jane, to avoid them, made a spring from the pathway into the road. The bank was slippery with the rain, her foot slipped, and she fell heavily.

Sister Mildred stooped over the bank, and held out her hand. Was Jane stunned? No: but just for a minute or two she could not stir. She put one hand to her side as Sister Mildred helped her on to the path. Of no use to try to escape now.

"Are you hurt, child?"

"I—I think I am, ma'am," panted Jane. "I fell on my side." And she burst into tears again.

"And now tell me what the matter is, and where you were going to."

"Anywhere," sobbed the girl. "My aunt has turned me out-of-doors?"

"Dear me!" cried Sister Mildred. "When did she do that?"

"Now. When I got in from Stilborough. She—she—met me with reproach and anger. Oh, she is very violent! She frightened me. I have never seen her so before."

"But where were you running to now?" persisted Sister Mildred. "There, don't sob in that way."

"Anywhere," repeated Jane, hysterically. "I can sit under a hedge till morning, and, then go to Stilborough. I am too tired to go back to Stilborough now."

Sister Mildred, who had held her firmly by the arm all this time, considered before she spoke again. Fearing there might be too much reason to condemn the girl—for during Mary Ursula's interview with Mr. Knivett, the Sisters had regaled her with the rumours that were going about to Jane's disadvantage—she yet could not in humanity suffer her to go "anywhere." Jane was an especial favourite with all the Sisters. At least, she always had been.

"Come in, child," she said. "We will take care of you

until the morning. And then—why, we must see what is to be done. Your aunt, so self-contained and calm a woman, must have had some great cause, I fear, for turning you out."

In a state of strange agitation, Jane suffered the Sister to lead her indoors. Mary Ursula spoke a kind word or two of encouragement. It was no time for reproach: even if the Grey Ladies had deemed it their province to administer it.

Jane was shown to a room. One or two beds were always kept made up at the Grey Nunnery. Sister Betsy, invariably cheerful and pleasant with all the world, whether they were good or bad, rich or poor, went in with Jane and helped her to undress, chatting while she did it. And so the evening came to an end, and the house was at length steeped in quietness.

But in the middle of the night an alarm arose. Jane Hallet was ill. Her room was next to that of Sisters Ann and Phœby: they heard her moaning, and hastened to her.

"Mercy be good to us!" exclaimed the former, startled out of all equanimity by what she saw and heard. "We must call the Lady Superior."

"No, no," corrected the calmer Sister Phœby. "Sister Mildred must deal with this."

So the unusual expedient was resorted to of disturbing the ex-Superior in her bed, who was so much older than any of them. Sister Mildred dressed herself, and proceeded to Jane's room; and then lost not a moment in despatching a summons for Mr. Parker. He came at once.

At early dawn the wail of a feeble infant was heard within the chamber. A small, sickly infant that could not possibly live. The three Sisters mentioned were alone present. None of the others had been disturbed.

"The baptismal basin," whispered the elder lady to Sister Ann. "Make haste."

A china bowl of great value that had been an heirloom in the Grant family, was brought in, half-filled with water. Sister Mildred rose—she had bent for a minute or two in silent prayer—took the infant in her arms, sprinkled it with the water, and named it "Jane." Laying it down gently, those in the room knelt again. Even Mr. Parker, turning from the bed, put his one knee on a chair.

At the hour the Grey Ladies usually rose, all signs of bustle

were over. Nothing remained to tell of what the night had brought forth, except the sick-bed of Jane Hallet, and a dead infant (ushered into the world all too soon), covered reverently with a sheet in the corner.

Breakfast done with, Sister Mildred betook herself up the cliff to Miss Hallet's, her ear-trumpet hanging from her waist-band. It was a painful interview. Never had the good Sister witnessed more pitiable distress. Miss Hallet's share in the pomp and pride of life had not been great, perhaps: but such as it was, it had now passed away from her for ever.

"I would far rather have died," moaned the poor lady, in her bitter feeling, her wounded pride. "Could I have died yesterday morning before this dreadful thing was revealed, I should have been comparatively happy. Heaven hears me assert it."

"It is a sad world," sighed Sister Mildred, fixing the ear-trumpet: "and a dreadful thing for Jane to have been drawn into its wickedness. But we must judge her charitably, Miss Hallet; she is but young."

Miss Hallet led the Sister upstairs, opened Jane's drawer with the blacksmith's key, and exhibited its contents as an additional aggravation to her cup of bitterness. Sister Mildred, a lover of fine work, could not avoid expressing admiration, as she took the things up one by one.

"They are beautiful!" she cried. "Look at the texture of the lace and cambric! No gentleman's child could have better than these. Poor Jane! she must have known well, then, what was coming. And such sewing! She learnt that from us!"

"Never, so long as she lives, shall she darken my doors again," was the severe answer. "You must fancy what an awful shock it was to me, Sister Mildred, when I opened this drawer last evening; and what I said to Jane on her entrance, I really cannot recall. I was out of my mind. Our family has been reduced lower and lower by misfortune; but never yet by disgrace."

"I'm sure I can't understand it," returned the puzzled Sister. "Jane was the very last girl I could have feared for. Well, it cannot be mended now. We will keep her until she is about again, Miss Hallet."

"I should put her outside the Nunnery gate to-day!" came the stern reply.

"That would kill her," said Sister Mildred, shaking her head in compassion. "And destroying her body would not save her soul. The greater the sin, the greater, remember, was the compassion of our Lord and Master."

"She can never hold up her head in this world again. And for myself, as I say, I would far rather die than live."

"She won't hold it up as she has held it: it is not to be expected," assented Sister Mildred, emphatically. "But—well—we must see what can be done with her when she's better. Will you come and see her, Miss Hallet?"

"*I* come and see her!" repeated the indignant relative, feeling the proposal nothing less than an outrage. "I would not come to her if she lay dying. Unless it were to reproach her with her shame."

"You are very hard now," said indulgent Sister Mildred, "and perhaps I should be so in your place: I know what a bitter blow it is. But the anguish will subside. Time heals the worst wounds: and, the more we are weaned from this world, the nearer we draw to Heaven."

She dropped her trumpet, held Miss Hallet's hand in hers, and turned to depart. That ruffled lady, after escorting her to the door, turned the key and drew the bolt, as if she wanted to have no more to do with the outer world, and would fain deny it entrance.

"Oh, ma'am, what a sight o' news is this!" broke from staring Nancy Gleeson, meeting the Grey Lady face to face at a turning of the cliff path, and lifting her hands in reprobation.

It was the first instalment of the unpleasantness that must perforce arise, and could only be met. Of no use for Sister Mildred to say "What do you mean?" or "Jane Hallet is nothing to you." The unhappy news had gone flying about the village from end to end: it could neither be arrested nor could the village comments be checked.

"I can't stay talking this morning," replied the deaf lady; who rather guessed than heard the theme. "You had better go home to your little ones; they may be setting themselves on fire again."

"'Twasn't so over long ago she was a-lugging our Bessy up

the path, and looked fit to drop over it," continued Nancy, disregarding the injunction. "Seemed to me, ma'am, then as if 'twas odd. Well, who'd ha' thought it o' Miss Jane Hallet?"

Sister Mildred was yards away, and Nancy Gleeson's words were wasted on the air. At the foot of the cliff, as she was crossing the road, Mrs. Bent saw her from the inn-door, and came over with a solemn face.

"How is she doing?" asked the landlady, speaking close to Sister Mildred's ear.

"Pretty well."

"I shall never be surprised at anything after this, ma'am; never. When Molly, all agape, brought the news in this morning I could have sent a plate at her head, for repeating what I thought was nothing but impossible scandal. Miss Hallet must be fit to hang herself."

"It is grievous for all parties, Mrs. Bent," spoke Sister Mildred. "Especially for Jane herself."

"One can't help pitying her, poor young thing. To have blighted her life at her age! And anything that's wanted while she's ill, that the Nunnery may be out of, please send over to me for. She's heartily welcome to it, Sister Mildred."

The Sister nodded her thanks, and walked on. Mr. Parker overtook her at the Nunnery door, and they went up together to the sick-room.

Jane lay, white and wan, on the pillow, Sister Mona standing by her side. She looked so still and colourless that for the moment they might have thought her dead. Their entrance, however, caused her to open her eyes; and then a faint colour tinged her face.

Mr. Parker ordered some refreshment to be administered; and Sister Mona left to get it. "See that she has it at once," he said, speaking into the trumpet. "I am in a hurry just now, and cannot stay."

"Is any one ill?" asked Sister Mildred.

"A child up at the coastguard-station is in convulsions, and they have sent for me in haste. Good-morning, madam, for the present. I'll call in on my return."

"Only one moment, doctor," cried Sister Mildred, following him out to the corridor, and speaking in a whisper. "Is Jane in danger?"

"No, I think not. She must be kept quiet."

To the infinite astonishment of Sister Mildred, somewhat to her scandal, Mr. Harry Castlemaine appeared on the staircase, close upon the departure of the doctor. He must have come into the Nunnery as the latter let himself out. Taking off his hat, he advanced straight to Sister Mildred, the open door at which she was standing no doubt indicating the sick-room.

"By your leave, Sister Mildred," he said, with a grave smile —and passed in.

She was too utterly astonished to stop him. But she followed him in, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Mr. Castlemaine, what do you mean by this? Do you think, sir, I can allow it?"

"I *must* speak a word or two to Jane," he whispered in her ear-trumpet. "Dear lady, be charitable, and leave me with her just for a minute. On my honour, my stay shall not much exceed that."

And partly through his persuasive voice and smile, and hands, for he gently forced her to the door, partly in her anxiety to obey the doctor's injunction of keeping Jane quiet, Sister Mildred found herself outside in the corridor again, the door closed upon her.

"My goodness!" cried the perplexed lady to herself. "It's well that I am here, and not one of the younger Sisters."

In a minute or two, he came out again; his hand held forth.

"Thank you, dear Sister Mildred. I thank you from my heart."

"No, I cannot take it," she said, turning pointedly away from his proffered hand.

"Are you so offended with me for coming in?"

"No: though it is wrong. You know why I cannot take your hand in friendship, Harry Castlemaine."

He stood a moment as though about to reply; but closed his lips without making any. "God bless you, dear lady; you are all very good: I don't know what Greylands would do without you. And—please"—he added, turning back again a step or two.

"Please what?" demanded Sister Mildred.

"Do not blame *her*. She does not deserve it. I do."

He went softly down the stairs and let himself out. John Bent was standing at his door as Harry came in view of the Dolphin, and the young man crossed over. But, when he got up, John had disappeared indoors. There was no mistaking that the movement was intentional, or the feeling that caused the landlord to shun him. Harry Castlemaine stood still by the bench, evidently very much annoyed. Presently he began to whistle slowly and softly, a habit of his when in deep thought, and looked up and down the road, as if uncertain which way he should take.

A knot of fishermen had gathered round the small boats on the beach, and were talking together less lazily than usual: possibly, and indeed probably, their exciting theme was the morning's news. One of them detached himself from the rest and came up towards the Dolphin, remarking that he was going to "wet his whistle." Mr. Tim Gleeson in a blue night-cap.

To judge by his flushed face and his not altogether steady gait, he had already gone through the process. When he saw Mr. Harry Castlemaine standing there, he came straight up to him, touching his cap. That trifling mark of respect he did observe: but when he had taken a glass, there was no such hail-fellow-well-met in all Greylands as Tim Gleeson. He would have accosted Mr. Castlemaine himself.

"In with the tide, Gleeson?" remarked Harry—who was always pleasant with the men.

"Her's just gone out, sir," returned Gleeson, alluding to the boat. "I didn't go in her."

"Missed her, eh?" A misfortune Mr. Gleeson often met with.

"Well, I did miss of her, as might be said. I was a-talking over the news, Mr. Harry, with Tuff and one or two on 'em, and her went and put off without me."

Harry wondered he was not turned out of the boat altogether. But he said nothing, and resumed his whistling. Gleeson, however, chose to enter upon the subject of the "news," and applied a hard word to Jane.

Harry's eagle glance was turned on the man like lightning. "What is that, Gleeson?" he asked, in a quiet but imperious tone.

And Mr. Tim Gleeson, owing no doubt to the glass he had taken, was so imprudent as to repeat it.

The next moment he seemed to have pins and needles in his eyes, and found himself flat on the ground. Struck down by the stern hand of Mr. Harry Castlemaine.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A ROUGH SEA.

The weather was very boisterous. Ethel Reene, her scarlet cloak on, and her hat tied securely over her ears, was making her way to the top of the cliff opposite the coastguard-station. A somewhat adventurous expedition in such a wind; but Ethel was well used to the path.

It was an unusually glorious sea to-day. A sea to impress the mind with the marvellous works of the Great Creator. "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther. And here shall thy proud waves be stayed."

The waves were leaping mountains high; the roaring of the water was like prolonged thunder. Ethel sat with clasped hands and subdued face and heart, lost in contemplation of the Majesty seen and unseen. It was not the time for silent thought to-day, or for telling her secrets to the sea: wonder, praise, awe, could alone fill the mind.

"Is it not a grand scene!"

The words were spoken close to her ear, and she turned quickly, holding her hat. The fastenings of her hair had blown away, and it fell around her in a wave of curls. Mr. North was the speaker. He had made his way up the rocks to watch this wonderful sea from the elevation, not suspecting that any one was there.

"I do not think I ever saw it so rough as this," said Ethel, as he took her hand in greeting, and then sat down beside her.

"And I never half as rough; but it has not been my privilege to live near the sea," he answered. "Are you sure it is safe for you to sit here, Ethel?"

"Oh yes. I am ever so far from the edge, you see."

"I don't know," he doubtingly answered; "the wind is so

strong. Mr. and Mrs. Castlemaine might warn you away, if they saw you here."

As if to give weight to his words, a more furious blast came sweeping over them. Ethel involuntarily bent her head down. Mr. North hastily put his arm round her for protection.

"You see!" he cried, when the rush had subsided. "It is dangerous. Had I not been here, you might have been blown over."

"Oh no; but—perhaps—I had better not remain after that. I have never before encountered such a gale."

As he was there, however, and holding her safely, she made no movement. Ah, how could she! was it not all too delicious! —and the wind was such an excuse. In after-years, whether for her they might be long or short, Ethel would never lose the remembrance of this hour. That turbulent sea would for ever be one of her mind's unfading pictures.

They sat on together, speaking only a word now and then, for their voices were lost in the hurricane. But they could not stay there for ever, and by-and-by, when the fury of the storm seemed suddenly to have spent itself, and the wind began to abate, Ethel rose to depart.

"You will think of me sometimes, and of this day, when I am far away—divided from you by sea and land, Ethel?" he murmured, as they stood to take one last look at the restless, turbulent waters.

"Are you going?" she stammered.

"I fear I shall have to do so eventually. The—the business that brought me here does not advance; nor does it seem likely to advance."

"Did business bring you here?"

"Yes."

"I had no idea of that. Of what nature is it?"

"It is partly connected with property."

"The property that you told me might come to you by inheritance?"

"Yes. The coming seems very far off, though; farther off than ever: and I—I am doing no good by staying."

"No good!" exclaimed Ethel, in surprise.

"In one sense of the word. For, each day that I remain will only render the pain of departing more intolerable."

Their eyes met. Ethel was at no loss to understand him. Whether he meant her to do so or not, he could scarcely have decided. But for great self-control, he must have spoken out plainly. And yet, to what end? This fair girl might never become more to him that she was now, and their love would be thrown away to die on the shoals of adverse fate; as three parts of first love in this world ever is.

He walked with her as far as Chapel Lane, Ethel's way home to-day. There they stood to shake hands.

"I wonder if we shall ever again sit together watching such a sea as this has been!" he said, retaining her hand, and gazing down at her conscious face.

"We do not get such a sea as this once a-year."

"No. And when it next comes, nothing may be left of me to you but remembrance. Good-bye, Ethel."

She made her way homewards as swiftly as the wind would allow. Mr. North, somewhat sheltered under the lee of the Grey Nunnery, once he had passed the open chapel ruins, gave his mind up to thought.

His position had begun to cause him serious reflection: in fact, to worry him. Nothing could be more uncertain, nothing more unsatisfactory. Should it turn out that Mr. Castlemaine had had any hand in injuring Anthony—why, then George North must give up all hope of Ethel. Ethel was to Mr. Castlemaine as a daughter, and that would be sufficient bar to George North's making her his wife. Long ago would he have declared himself to the Master of Greylands but for Charlotte Guise. But the bare mention of such an act upset poor Madame Guise utterly: she had implored, entreated, *commanded* him to be silent. He might leave Greylands, she said; leave all investigation to her; she did not want him to remain; but to ruin every chance of tracing Anthony's fate was not to be heard of. This chafed Mr. North's spirit: but he felt that he could not act in defiance of his brother's widow. The morning's interview on the cliff with Ethel had not tended to lessen the embarrassment of his position, but rather to bring it more clearly before him.

Deep in thought, the Nunnery passed, he unguardedly approached the open part by the beach, and the wind took his hat and whirled it away.

Harry Castlemaine chanced to be passing, caught it, and brought it, laughing, to Mr. North. The young men liked each other and were cordial when they met; but they had not advanced to intimacy. Each had his reasons for avoiding it: Harry Castlemaine never chose to become too friendly with any stranger sojourning at Greylands; George North, under present circumstances, rather shunned the Castlemaines.

"It is well that heads are not loose, as well as hats, or they'd be nowhere to-day," said Harry, restoring the hat. "Where's your ribbon?"

"It had already blown away. Thank you. What a grand sea it is!"

"Wonderful. A rare sea, even for Greylands. Good-day."

They parted; Harry Castlemaine went his way, and George North steered his course for the Dolphin. There, over his modest luncheon, he brooded over all the difficulties of his position; and finally made up his mind that if something did not shortly turn up about Anthony he must say farewell to Greylands.

The next event to excite the village was the disappearance of Jane Hallet from the Nunnery.

Something like a fortnight had elapsed since her illness, or from that to three weeks, and she was able to walk about her room and do, at her own request, some sewing for the Sisters. Mr. Harry Castlemaine had not intruded on the Nunnery again. It was getting time to think of what was to be done with her: where she was to go, how she was to live. Jane had been so meek, so humble throughout this illness, so thankful for the care and kindness shown her, *and for the absence of reproach*, that the Grey Ladies, in spite of their condemnation, could not help liking her in their hearts almost as much as they had liked her before, and they felt an anxious interest in her future. Sister Mildred especially, more reflective than the others by reason of her years, often wondered what that future was to be, what it could be. Miss Hallet—shut up at home, her cheeks scarlet with shame whenever she went abroad: which she took care should be only on Sundays; but divine service, such as it was in Greylands, she would not miss—had never been to the Nunnery to see Jane, or taken the slightest notice of her. Sister Mildred had paid another visit to the cliff, and held a

second conference with Miss Hallet, but it resulted in no good for Jane.

"She has blighted her own life and embittered mine," said Miss Hallet. "Never more can I hold up my head amongst my neighbours. I will not willingly see her again; I hope I never shall see her."

"The worst of it is, that all this reproach will not undo the past," returned Sister Mildred. "If it would, I would say punish Jane to the last extremity of harshness. But it won't."

"She deserves to suffer for the rest of her life."

"The evil has come upon her, and every one knows it. Your receiving her again into your home will not add to it or take from it. She has nowhere else to go."

"I pray you cease, Sister Mildred," said Miss Hallet; and it was evident that she spoke in utter pain. "You cannot —pardon me—you cannot understand my feelings in this matter."

"What shall you do without Jane? She was very necessary to you; and she was your only companion."

"Could I ever make a companion of her again? For the rest, I have taken a little servant—Brown the blacksmith's eldest girl—and I find her useful."

"If I could only induce you to be lenient, for Jane's sake!" urged the Sister, desperately at issue between her own respect for Miss Hallet's outraged feelings and her compassion for Jane.

"I never can be," was the answer, stiffly spoken: but Miss Hallet's fingers were trembling as she smoothed back her black silk mitten. "As to receiving her under my roof again, why, if I were ever brought to do so, I should be regarded as no better than herself. I should be no better—as I look upon it. Madam, you think it right to ask me this, I know: but to entertain it is an impossibility."

Sister Mildred dropped her ear-trumpet. The hardness vexed her. And yet she could only acknowledge that it was in a degree excusable. But for the difficulties lying in Jane's path, she had never urged it.

So there the matter rested. Miss Hallet had despatched her new servant to the Nunnery with a portion of Jane's wardrobe: and what on earth was to become of Jane the Sisters were

unable to conjecture. They could not keep her: the Nunnery was not a reformatory, or meant to be one. Consulting together, they at last thought of a plan.

Sister Mildred went one morning into Jane's room. Jane was seated at the window in a shawl, busy at her work—some pinafores for the poor little school-children. Her face was prettier than ever and very delicate, her manner deprecating, as she rose to receive the late Superior.

"How are you getting on, Jane?"

"I have nearly finished this one, madam," she answered, holding out the pinafore.

"I don't mean as to work. I mean yourself."

"Oh, I feel nearly well again, madam," replied Jane. "I grow stronger every day."

"I was talking about you with some of the ladies last night, Jane. We wonder what you are about to do. Have you any plan, or idea of your own?

Poor Jane's face flushed painfully. She did not answer.

"Not that we wish to hurry you away, Jane. You are welcome to remain, and we intend you to do so, for at least two weeks longer. Only it will not do to leave considerations to the last moment: this is why I speak to you now."

Sister Mildred had sat down close by Jane; by bending her ear, she could do without the trumpet. Jane's hand, slender always, and still weak, trembled as she held the pinafore.

"Have you formed any plans, Jane?"

"Oh no, ma'am."

"I thought so," returned Sister Mildred, for indeed she did not see what plans Jane, lonely and friendless, could form. "When we cannot do what we would, we must do what we can—that used to be one of your copies in small-hand, I remember, Jane."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, my dear, I don't want to speak harshly, but I think you must apply it to yourself. You can no longer do what you would: you will have to do what you can. I am sorry to say that your aunt continues inexorable: she will not shelter you again."

Jane turned to the table for her handkerchief. The tears were overflowing.

"We—the Sisters and myself—think it will be the best for you to take an easy place as maid——"

"As maid!" echoed Jane, looking startled.

"As maid, or to assist in light work in a good family far away from here. Sister Margaret thinks she can manage this—her connections are very good, you know. Of course the truth must be told to them; but you will be taken care of, and made happy—otherwise we would not place you—and have the opportunity afforded you of redeeming the past, so far as that is possible. You don't like this, I'm afraid, Jane; but what else is open to you?"

Jane was crying bitterly; but she made no answer.

"I will talk to you again to-morrow," said Sister Mildred, rising. "Think it over, Jane—and don't cry like that, child. If you can suggest anything better, why, we'll listen to it. We only want to help you, and to keep you out of harm for the future."

Jane was very sad and silent all that day. In the evening, after dark, Sister Caroline, who had been out on an errand, came in with round eyes, declaring she had seen Jane Hallet out-of-doors. The ladies reproved her. Sister Caroline often had fancies.

"If it was not Jane Hallet it was her ghost," cried Sister Caroline, lightly. "She was under the cliff by the sea. I never saw any one so much like Jane in my life."

"Have you been down under the cliff?" questioned Sister Charlotte.

"I went there for a minute or two with poor old Dame Tuff," explained the Sister. "She was looking after Jack, who had been missing since morning: she thought he might be lying under the cliff after taking too much ale. Whilst we were peering into all the holes and corners, some one ran past exactly like Jane."

"Ran past where?"

"Close along, between us and the sea. Towards the Limpets."

"But no one could want anything that way. They might be drowned."

"Well, it looked like Jane."

"Hush!" said one of the graver ladies. "You know it could not be Jane Hallet. Did you find Jack Tuff?"

"No: his poor mother's gone home crying. What a trouble sons are! But—may I go and see if Jane is in her room?"

It was really very obstinate of Sister Caroline: but she was allowed to go. Down she came with a rush.

Jane was *not* in her room.

Several of the Sisters, excited by the news, trooped up in a body. Very true. The room had been made neat by Jane, but there was no trace left of herself. On the table lay some lines in pencil addressed to Sister Mildred.

A few lines of grateful, heartfelt thanks for the kindness shown to her, and an imploring hope that the ladies would think of her with as little harshness as they could. But not a single word as to where she had gone.

"Pray Heaven she has not done anything rash!" mentally cried Sister Mildred, with pale cheeks, as she thought of the dangers of the path that led to that part of the coast called the Limpets.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

PARADISE.

WINTER was coming in, though it was not yet wintry weather, for it was mild and balmy: more like a fine September than the close of November.

The glass-doors of the red room at Greylands' Rest were thrown open to the garden, and to the few autumn flowers that yet lingered around. Dinner was over, and the ladies were in the parlour again. Little Marie Guise was spending the day there, and was now playing with Flora: her mother was talking with Mrs. Castlemaine. Ethel sat drawing.

"Dear me! I think this is Miss Castlemaine."

The words were madame's, and they all looked up. Yes; advancing through the garden in her grey dress, and with her stately step, came Mary Ursula. Seeing them sitting there, and the doors open, she had turned aside on her way to the front-entrance. Ethel ran out.

"How good of you, Mary! Have you come to stay the afternoon?"

"No, Ethel. I want to see my uncle. Is he at home?"

"I think so. We left him at table. Come in."

Mrs. Castlemaine made much of the visitor. Disliking Mary Ursula at heart, thankful that she had joined the Grey Sisterhood and was out of the way of Greylands' Rest, Mrs. Castlemaine made a great pretence of welcome at these chance visits.

"And why can you not stay, now you are here?" asked Mrs. Castlemaine, purring upon Mary as she sat down. "Do take your bonnet off."

"I would stay if I could," said Mary, "but I must be back again by four o'clock. Mr. Knivett sent me a note this morning to say he should be over at that hour with some papers that require my signature."

"I suppose you have been busy with your money and your responsibilities," spoke Mrs. Castlemaine. "You must feel quite rich."

"I do," said Mary, with earnest truth. Looking back to the past, she had not then thought herself so rich in her anticipated many thousands a-year, as she now felt with these two or three hundreds of additional income. "We are rich or poor by comparison, you know," she said, smiling, rising to go to her uncle in the dining-room.

Mr. Castlemaine was no longer there. Miles, putting away the wine and dessert, said his master had gone up to his room to write letters. So Mary went after him.

Several days had passed now since the departure of Jane Hallet from the Nunnery. And the longer the time that elapsed without news of her, the greater grew the marvel of Greylands. The neighbours asked one another whether Jane had mysteriously disappeared, after the fashion of Anthony Castlemaine. It was rumoured that the affair altogether had much annoyed the Master of Greylands. He was supposed to have talked sharply to his son on the subject; but how Harry received it, or what he replied, was not known. Harry rather shunned home just then, and made pretexts for distant excursions, which kept him away from home for a day or two at a time.

But a graver doubt than any was gaining ground: the same doubt that had crossed Sister Mildred the night of the dis-

appearance. Had Jane committed some rash act? In short, to speak out boldly, as Greylands did, people thought that Jane must have thrown herself into the sea. The way to the Limpet Rocks—once old Dame Dance's cottage was passed—led to nowhere but the rocks: and no one in their senses would seek them at night unless they were tired of life. Clearly there was but one inference to be drawn.

Of course, it was altogether inconsistent with Greylands' neighbourly frankness that this dismal conviction should long be concealed from Miss Hallet. Perhaps it was considered a matter of conscience to make it known to her. Mrs. Pike at the shop was the first to run up, and undertake the communication.

Miss Hallet received it in silence: for all the world as if she had been a stock or a stone, as Mrs. Pike related afterwards: and for a day or two she held on in her high and mighty course. But it could not last. She had human feelings, as well as other people: it might have been that they were all the keener from her apparent coldness; and they asserted themselves in spite of her wounded pride. The news shocked her; the more she tried to drive it from her mind, the more persistently it took up its abode there: and at length a whole flood-tide of remorse and repentance set in: for she asked herself whether *she* had helped Jane to her dreadful fate. It is one thing to browbeat our friends to within an inch of their lives: but quite another thing to drive them into their graves.

On the second evening, when twilight was sufficiently dim to enfold her, Miss Hallet went down to seek an interview with Sister Mildred at the Nunnery; and was admitted. Mary Ursula Castlemaine was also in the room, writing at a side-table: but she did not interfere in any way, or take part in the conversation.

"I have come to hear the truth of this," gasped Miss Hallet, whose every effort to suppress her agitation only increased. "At least, madam, so far as you know it yourself."

"But, my dear good woman, I know nothing," briskly returned Sister Mildred. "We don't know what to think ourselves. I wish we did."

They were sitting side by side on the well-worn horsehair sofa, which was drawn close to the fire. Mary was in the further corner behind them, writing by the light of a shaded

candle. Miss Hallet untied her bonnet-strings, as if she needed air.

"Jane *cannot* have put an end to her life!" spoke Miss Hallet, her trembling lips proving that she by no means felt assured of the fact. "She was too religious a girl to do anything so desperately wicked."

"I tell myself so ten times a-day," returned Sister Mildred. "And I try to think so."

"Oh, if you can help me to find her—if you can give me a hope that she is still living, do so," she implored, placing her hands, in her agitation, on the arm of Sister Mildred. "Let me not have her death upon my conscience!"

The good Sister took both hands and held them in hers. "For my own sake, I would do it if I could," she gently said. "To find Jane, I would forfeit a great deal that is precious to me."

"It is killing me," said Miss Hallet. "It will kill me speedily unless this uncertainty can be ended. For the past two days, I have not had one moment's peace. Night and day, the one dreadful doubt is upon me with harrowing torment. Where is Jane?"

"We cannot even guess where she can be," said Sister Mildred, shaking her head. "No one seems to know."

A moment's silence, and then the sound of sobs and tears broke upon the room. Miss Hallet had not given way like this even when her nephew died.

But they could give her no satisfaction, no comfort. Sister Mildred, shaking hands with her before departure, spoke cheerfully of hope, but it was very negative consolation.

"My dear, did you note what passed?" questioned Sister Mildred of Mary Ursula, when they were alone. "How distressing this is!"

Mary rose and came forward. "My heart ached for her all the time," she said. "Miss Hallet acted harshly; but she has my sincerest pity. I wish I could relieve her!"

"If any one in this world knows where Jane is, it must be Mr. Harry Castlemaine," observed Sister Mildred, in a cold, subdued whisper. "That is, if she be still alive. I wonder, my dear, whether we might ask him."

"Whether he would give us any information, you mean,"

replied Mary Ursula. "He ought to do so; and I think he would. Though, perhaps, it might be better arrived at through his father."

"Through his father!" echoed Sister Mildred, quickly. "My dear, we should never dare to question the Master of Greylands."

"I would: and will," concluded Mary Ursula.

It was in pursuance of this resolve that Mary had come up this afternoon to Greylands' Rest. Harry had gone to Newerton for a day or two, this time really on business. Mary went upstairs and knocked at her uncle's door.

The Master of Greylands was doing nothing. He had apparently been writing at his bureau, for it was open, one drawer stood out and some papers were lying about. He had now quitted it, and was sitting back in a chair near the window; his eyes resting on the calm sea in the distance. In reality he saw nothing; his thoughts were far away.

"Nothing has gone right since that fatal night," he was saying to himself, his brow knitted into lines of pain. "Teague has said all the summer that suspicions are abroad—though I think he must be wrong; and now there's this miserable trouble about Harry and that girl! For myself, I seem to be treading on a volcano. The stir after Anthony is not yet at an end: I am sure of it; instinct warns me that it is not: and should a thorough search be instituted, who can tell where it would end, or what might come to light?"

A blazing log fell on the hearth with a crash. Mr. Castlemaine looked round mechanically: but all was safe. The room was just as bare as usual: no signs of life or occupation in it, excepting the master himself and the open bureau.

"When men look askance at me," ran on his thoughts, "it makes my blood boil. I am living it down; I shall live it down; but I have not dared to resent it openly, and that has told against me. And if the stir should arise again, and unpleasant facts come out—why then it would be all over with the good name of the Master of Greylands. The world calls me proud: and I am proud: but Heaven knows that I have had enough this year to take all pride out of me."

A deep sigh, telling of the inward trouble, escaped him. Men whose minds are at ease cannot sigh like that.

"It has been an unlucky year for the Castlemaines: a fatal year. After a long tide of prosperity such years do come, I suppose, to a family. Peter's trouble first, and his uncertain death. Anthony's arrival and the trouble he gave me, and then *his* death: that, unfortunately, had nothing uncertain about it. The cloud that fell upon me, and still remains; and now, Teague's doubts; and now again, Harry! Better, perhaps, to get out of it all, before the opportunity passes."

Again a deep sigh broke from him. He put his elbow on the arm of his chair, and leaned his brow upon his hand.

"Poor Anthony," he murmured, after a pause. "Oh, if the doings of that night could be recalled! I would give the best years of my remaining life to undo its fatal work. Just one moment of mad passion, and it was all over! What can his friends be about, I wonder, that they have not come to seek him? They do not come; they do not write: French people don't care for their relatives, perhaps—and they must be more French than English. If Anthony——"

A gentle knock at the door had been unheard by Mr. Castlemaine: a second knock was followed by the entrance of Mary Ursula in her Sister's dress. So completely was Mr. Castlemaine buried in these unpleasant, far-away scenes, that just for a moment he stared absently at the intruder. Mary could not help noticing his haggard appearance and the look of pain in his eyes.

"Why, Mary Ursula, is it you?" he cried, starting up. "Come in, my dear."

With a rapid movement, as he advanced to meet her, he swept the papers back and closed the bureau. Then he placed a chair for her near the fire, but Mary would not sit down. She had not time, she said: and she went and stood by the window.

It was not a pleasant matter to enter upon, and she spoke very slightly and briefly. If her uncle had learnt anything through his son of Jane Hallet, it would be a relief if he would impart it to the Grey Ladies; an especial relief to the aunt, who was in a distressing state of suspense. Fears, that Jane had made away with herself, existed in Greylands.

"My dear, I know nothing whatever about her," said Mr. Castlemaine, standing at the window by the side of his niece,

"The whole affair has been most grievous and annoying to me —as you may well conceive. I had some sharp words with Harry at the time, and it has created a sort of coolness between us. Since then, we have mutually avoided the subject."

Mary sighed. "I cannot help being sorry for Jane," she said, "whatever may be the end. She is too good to have lost herself. You do not know, Uncle James, how nice she is."

"'Sorry' is not the word for it," emphatically spoke the Master of Greylands, his stern tones meant for his absent son. "I always held the Hallets in great respect."

Mary turned to depart. Other things were perplexing her as well as this unfortunate business. It struck her more and more how ill her uncle looked; ill, and full of care. Lines had begun to indent themselves on his once smooth brow.

"Are you well, Uncle James?" she stayed to say.

"Why do you ask?"

"You do not look well. There is something in your face that—that——"

"That what, child?"

"That reminds me of papa. As he looked the last month or two of his life."

"Ay. I have had worry lately, from more sources than one. And that tries a man's looks, Mary, more than all."

He attended her downstairs. She said farewell to the red room, and commenced her walk back to the Nunnery.

Somewhat later, before the dusk of the November evening came on, Madame Guise attired herself to take Marie home. The little girl was showing symptoms of a delicate chest, and the Sisters had begged her mother to let her return early. To please the child, they went on through the back buildings, which were at some distance from the house, that she might see the ducks, and the cocks and hens roosting.

Quitting the fold-yard to cross the meadow, which would bring them round to the avenue, they came upon Mr. North, sitting on the stump of a tree, and sketching a bit of the old barn.

"Are you here, George?" spoke madame. "What are you doing?"

He held up the sketch to show her: drawing little Marie towards him at the same time to give her a kiss.

"Why you not come to see me?" asked the child in French. For she had taken a great fancy to this pleasant gentleman, who had bonbons in his pocket for her whenever he called at the Nunnery.

"We must not stay, Marie," said her mother. "It is growing late, and you will have to hasten with that drawing, George. It will soon be quite dark."

"Oh, I shall finish it."

"Have you heard anything, George, that can throw light on poor Anthony?" she looked back, to whisper.

"Nothing," he answered.

"Nor I. I begin almost to despair. Au revoir."

Meanwhile, indoors, Mr. Castlemaine had gone up to his room again, and Flora in the red room was making herself disagreeable as usual. The young lady's desire that Marie should stay to tea had met with no response, and she was sulking in consequence.

For some little time she relieved herself by kicking her feet about, throwing down the fire-irons, and shaking the table to disturb Ethel. By-and-by, when it grew dusk, and Mrs. Castlemaine had to hold her book very close to her eyes, and Ethel to put up her drawing, the young lady saw a wider field for annoyance. Advancing to the piano, she brought both her hands down on the keys with her whole might. The result was a crash that might have aroused the seven sleepers.

"How dare you, Flora?" exclaimed Ethel. "Don't you know the piano was tuned this week?"

A derisive laugh: and another crash.

"Mamma, will you speak to her?"

Crash the third. Mrs. Castlemaine, absorbed in her romance, took no notice whatever.

"Do you think I will have my piano served in that way?" cried Ethel, starting up. "What a dreadful child you are!"

A tussle for victory, and then Ethel succeeded in shutting and locking the piano. It was her own: a present from Mr. Castlemaine, and a beautiful instrument. Flora turned to the table, took up Ethel's drawing-book and began creasing the leaves.

"Oh, mamma, why do you not speak to her?" cried Ethel,

in distress, as she tried to get possession of the book, and failed. "Mamma!"

"How tiresome you are, Ethel!" exclaimed Mrs. Castlemaine: for her story was at a most interesting crisis, and she would not be disturbed during these last few moments of daylight. "Sit down and be quiet. The dear child would do no harm, if you only let her alone."

The dear child had retreated from the table, and was dancing about the room like a little maniac, still injuring the sketch-book. Injustice is hard to bear, even where the temper is naturally as sweet as Ethel's.

"Give me that book," said Ethel, going up to Flora.

"I shan't."

"I tell you, Flora, to give it to me."

Flora was holding the book open above her head, and laughing an ugly, mocking laugh. Suddenly, without warning, she dashed it full in Ethel's face: a pretty sharp blow.

Smarting with the pain, Ethel seized the tiresome child by the arms. Flora screamed, and called out in a rage that Ethel was pinching her. Then dropping the book, she struck Ethel in the face with all her force. Agitated, indignant, but the book secured, Ethel stood before Mrs. Castlemaine.

"Am I to bear this, mamma?—and you look on and say nothing!"

"You should let her alone: it is your own fault," contemptuously retorted Mrs. Castlemaine.

Justice in that house, unless Mr. Castlemaine was at hand, Ethel had long ceased to hope for. But the present moment was an unusually bitter one; it tried her terribly. She quitted the room; and, seeing the hall-door open, ran out in a passion of tears, and dashed down the path.

It was dusk but not dark; the bare trees, the wintry beds telling of departed flowers, spoke of loneliness. But not more lonely, they, than Ethel.

Reaching the outer gate, she threw her arms upon it, crying bitterly; gazing down the avenue, as if longing to go forth into the world never to return. Alas, there was no chance of that; she was chained to this home, so often made miserable and unhappy.

Bending her face upon her hands, which rested still upon

the gate, she gave way to all the moment's anguish. Not a living creature was within sight or hearing; she believed herself as much alone as though it had been a desert, and could indulge her grief unmolested.

"Oh, Ethel, what is this?"

A soft, low, pained voice spoke the words in her ear; a fond hand was laid upon her head; the only voice, the only hand that could have thrilled her heart.

Mr. North, passing into the avenue on his way home from sketching the old barn, his portfolio being under his arm, had come upon her. Opening the gate, he drew her on the bench under the laurel-trees and sat down beside her.

"Now, tell me what it is?"

Beguiled by the seduction of the moment, smarting under the treatment she had received, contrasting his loving, gentle kindness with the cruel indifference of the only mother she had ever known, Ethel gave him a brief account of what had passed. His breast rose with indignation.

"Is it often so, Ethel?"

"Oh yes, very often. It has been so for years. I have never had any one really to love me since my father died; I have never known what it is to have a happy home: only this one of constant trouble and turbulence. I wish I could run away from it!"

He was not more prudent than she. He forgot wisdom, circumstances, reason: everything. His voice hushed, his words unchosen, he poured forth his tale of love, and asked her if she would be his wife. Ethel bent down her face, and cried silent, happy tears.

"You know, you must know, how I have loved you, Ethel. I should have spoken long ago, but circumstances held me back. Even now I fear that I cannot speak openly to Mr. Castlemaine: it may be some little time first. But oh, my darling, you have not, you cannot have mistaken my love."

Not a word. It was early yet for confession from her. Her face was still hidden.

"For one thing, I am not rich, Ethel. I have quite enough for comfort, but not that which would give you such a home as this. And Mr. Castlemaine——"

"I would rather live in a cottage and earn my bread, than

live here," she interrupted, all her candour rising to the surface.

"And Mr. Castlemaine may not choose you to quit this house for one less well appointed, my love," he went on. "What we might think sufficient, he might consider poverty."

"I have plenty of money of my own," said Ethel simply.

"Have you?" cried Mr. North, in a surprised and anything but gratified tone. He had certainly never known or suspected this; and foresaw that the fact might be only an additional reason for Mr. Castlemaine's rejecting him. "It may be so much the worse for us, Ethel. I may come into money myself; quite sufficient to satisfy even Mr. Castlemaine; or I may not. It is this uncertainty that has helped to keep me silent. But, come what will now, we cannot part."

No, they could never part. Heart beating against heart, knew and ratified it. He gathered her face to his, whispering his sweet love-vows as he kissed away the tears.

And, for Ethel, the lonely surroundings seemed suddenly to have changed to Paradise.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE LAST CARGO.

At her bedroom window, gazing out upon the sea, stood Mary Ursula Castlemaine. December had come in, but the weather was still balmy: people said to one another that they were going to have no winter. It had been one of those exceptional years when England seems to have borrowed some more genial climate: since the unsettled spring there had been nothing but smiles and sunshine.

As the weeks had rolled on since that communication made to Miss Castlemaine by Walter Dance the night of his accident (only to be retracted in the morning), the uneasiness of her mind rarely gave her rest. She had not dared to speak of it to Mr. Castlemaine. Had she been perfectly sure that he was in ignorance of it—in short, that he was not implicated in the matter, she would have told him all; but the uncertainty withheld her. The evidence of her own senses she could not ques-

tion, therefore she believed, that the wholesale smuggling, confessed to by young Dance in his fear of death, was an actual fact—that cargoes of lace, and other cargoes, were periodically run. The question agitating her was—had, or had not, this treason the sanction of the Master of Greylands? If it had, she must be silent on the subject for ever; if it had not, why then she would like to communicate with him upon it. For an idea had taken hold of her, arising she knew not from what instinct, that the ill-fate of Anthony—if ill-fate had in truth overtaken him—must have been the work of one of these disturbed nights when the Friar's Keep was invaded by lawless sailors.

It was this ever-present thought that disturbed her peace day and night. Smuggling and smugglers she would only have been too glad to forget; but the mysterious fate of Anthony haunted her as a nightmare. Another thing, too, added to her uneasiness. The Grey Monk, about which nothing had been heard for some weeks past, was, according to public rumour, appearing again.

In her heart she suspected that this Grey Monk and all the rest of the mystery had to do with the smuggling and with that only. Reason told her that Commodore Teague was the principal in it all, for whom the goods were run; and she tried to suppress that latent doubt of Mr. Castlemaine that would rise unbidden. If she could only set that doubt at rest! If she could only once ascertain that her uncle had nothing to do with the unlawful practices, why then she would disclose what she knew, and leave him to trace out this clue to the disappearance of Anthony.

Many a night had she stood at her casement window as she was standing now. But not until to-night had she again seen the same two-masted vessel—or what she imagined to be the same. It had certainly not been visible at sunset: but there it lay now, its form distinctly visible, just in the same spot in which it had been anchored that other night.

Mary threw on a shawl, opened her casement, and sat down and watched. Watched and waited. As the clocks told midnight, some stir was discernible on board; and presently the small boats, as before, came shooting out from the ship over the water. There could be no mistake: another of those cargoes was about to be run.

With a pale face but a resolute heart, Mary Ursula Castlemaine rose up. She would go forth again through the secret passage, and look on at these men. Not to denounce them; not to betray her presence or her knowledge of what they were about; but simply to endeavour to ascertain whether her uncle made one at the work.

Procuring the keys and the dark lantern, Mary started. There was some delay at setting out, in consequence of her being unable to open the first door. All the force she possessed would not turn the key in the lock. And she was on the point of giving it up as hopeless, when the key suddenly yielded. At least a quarter-of-an-hour must have been hindered in this way.

It was colder by far in the passage than it had been those other nights, for the time of the year was later: cold, and damp, and wofully dreary. Mary's courage sank at every step. Once she paused, questioning whether she could go on with this, but she reasoned herself into it. She reached the other end, placed her light on the floor, and put the key into this second door.

Meanwhile the boats had come in, were hauled up on the beach, and the goods were being landed. The men worked with a will. They wore sea-boots and waded through the water with bales on their shoulders. Much jabbering was carried on, for some of the sailors were foreigners; but all spoke in subdued tones. No one could be near enough to hear them, but it was always best to be prudent. The sailors were working as they worked on board ship, openly and undisguised; Commodore Teague was undisguised; but the other three men—for there were three others—wore capes and had huge caps tied on over their ears and brows; and in the uncertain light their best friends might not have known them. Two of these, it is as well to state it, were Tom Dance and his son; the other was a tall, slender, fine young man, who seemed to look on, rather than to work, and who did not wear the heavy sea-boots. But there was no sign of the Master of Greylands. The bales were carried up and put down close to the walls of the Keep. When all the goods coming from the ship should be landed, then the sailors would help to carry them through the passage to the cellars of the Hutt, before finally returning on board.

"Where you lay de pistols?" asked a sailor in broken English, as he threw down a huge bale from his shoulder.

"Down there as usual, Jansen," replied another, pointing to some stonework projecting from the walls of the Keep. "And the cutlasses too. Where should they be?"

"What do Jansen ask that for, Bill?" questioned one, of the last speaker.

"I get a bad dream last night," said Jansen, answering for himself. "I dream we all fighting, head, tail, wi' dem skulking coastguard. 'Jack,' he says to me in dream, 'where de knives, where de pistols?'—and we search about and we not find no knives, no pistols, and dey overpower us, and I call out, an' den I wake."

"I don't like them dreams," cried one of the crew.

"Dreams be hanged; there's nothing in 'em," struck in Tom Dance. "I dreamed one night, years ago, as my old mother was lying dead afore me: 'stead o' that, she told me next day she'd get married again if I didn't behave myself."

"Bear a hand here, Dance," said the Commodore.

At this moment, there was heard the sounds of a boat, dashing up through the waters.

Before the men could well look out, or discover what it meant, she was close upon them. A boat that had stolen silently from under the walls of the Grey Nunnery, where she had been lying concealed, waiting to pounce upon her prey. It was a boat belonging to the preventive service, and it contained Mr. Superintendent Nettleby and his coastguardsmen. After years of immunity the smugglers were discovered at last.

"In the King's name!" shouted the superintendent, as he sprang into the shallow water.

Jansen's dream had not told him true; inasmuch as the pistols and cutlasses lay ready to hand, and were at once caught up by their owners. A desperate fight ensued; a hand-to-hand struggle: pistols were fired, oaths were hissed out, knives were used. But though the struggle was fierce it was very short: all the efforts of the smugglers, both sailors and landsmen, were directed to securing their own safety by escaping to the ship. And just as Mary Ursula appeared upon the scene, they succeeded in pushing the boats off, and scrambling into them.

Mary was horror-struck. She had bargained for seeing rough men running packages of goods; but she had never thought of fighting and murder. Once within the vaults of the Friar's Keep the noise had guided her to the open door she had seen before, open again now; and she stood there sick and trembling.

They did not see her; she took care of that: hiding behind a pillar, her lantern darkened, she peeped out, shivering, on the scene. In the confusion she understood very little; she saw very little; though the cause of it all was sufficiently plain to her—the smugglers had been surprised by the preventive men. In the preventive-service boat lay a bound and wounded sailor, and also one of the customs' men who had been shot through the leg: not to mention minor wounds and contusions on both sides. Of all that, however, Mary knew nothing until later. There she stood close to the scene of action, hearing harsh voices, rough words, glancing out at the pile of goods, and at the dusky figures, before her, moving about in the night.

Almost as if by magic, for Mary did not see how or where they went, the men and the commotion disappeared together. The ship's boats, unfollowed, were hastening away; but what became of Mr. Nettleby and his staff? A moment ago, the small portion of beach before her not under water, had been alive with the preventive men; Mary had recognized the superintendent's voice as he shouted out some order; and now not a soul was visible. No doubt they were exploring the inner corners of the beach, never suspected of fraud, never visited by his Majesty's servants until now. She cautiously advanced a step or two and looked out. There, hauled up on the beach half-way, was the waiting boat, which she supposed to be unoccupied: the two wounded men, one of them having fainted from loss of blood, lying flat in it, were invisible to her.

In a short time, the officers reappeared. Mary drew back behind a pillar. Some of them got into the boat, and it was pushed off; three of them remained, either from want of space in the boat, or to keep guard over the goods; one of them was Mr. Nettleby.

Of what use to remain? None. She could not solve the doubt touching her uncle. Oh, that she had never come! that she had never had this most dreadful scene to look back upon!

Never again, she felt all too certain of it, should she attempt to enter the Keep by the subterranean passage.

She was retracing her way through the vaults, when a ray of the light from her lantern flashed upon a figure. A moving figure in woman's clothes, that seemed endeavouring to hide itself. Mary lifted her lantern, and saw the face of Jane Hallet!

Just for a moment or two a sickness as of some supernatural dread seized upon Miss Castlemaine. For Jane had never been heard of yet in Greylands, and very little doubt existed that she had found her bed at the bottom of the sea. The dark hood she was in the habit of wearing at night had fallen back from her face: her eyes wore a strange, terrified, appealing look in the sudden and startling light.

Recovering her reason, Mary laid her detaining hand upon her before she could escape. Which of the two faces was the whiter, it were hard to say.

"It is you, Jane?"

"Yes, madam, it is me," gasped Jane, in answer.

"Where have you been all this time, and where do you come from? And what brings you in this place now?"

The explanation was given in a few brief sentences. Jane, alarmed at the idea presented to her by the Grey Ladies of going out to service, against which step there existed private reasons, had taken refuge in Dame Dance's cottage under the cliff; she had been there ever since and was there still. Old Mrs. Dance was like a mother to her, she added; and had been in her entire confidence for a long time. As to what brought her in that place to-might, why—she was watching—she told Miss Castlemaine with much emotion—watching for the dreadful evil that had to-night occurred.

"I have been dreading it always, madam," she said, her breath laboured in its agitation. "I knew, through my brother, of the work that was sometimes done here—though he betrayed it to me by accident, not intentionally. I have come to the chapel ruins of a night to see if preparations were being made for running a cargo, and to learn whether the vessel, whose shape I knew, was standing out at sea. One night in the autumn I saw them run the goods: I was watching the whole time. It was one o'clock when I reached home, and my aunt

was ready to strike me: for I could not tell her why I had stayed out."

"Watching for what?" imperiously spoke Miss Castlemaine.

"Oh, madam, don't you see?—for the preventive men. I was ever fearing they would discover the work some night, and surprise it—as they have now done. I thought if I were on the watch for this (which no one else, as far as I could guess, seemed to fear or think of) I might be in time to warn—those who were concerned in it. But the officers were too cunning for me: as I stood just now looking over the low brink in the chapel ruins, I saw a boat shoot past from underneath the walls of the Nunnery, and I knew what it meant. Before I got down here the fight had begun."

Jane had gone into a fit of trembling. Somehow Miss Castlemaine's heart was hardening to her.

"At nine o'clock this evening I thought I saw the vessel standing off in the far distance," resumed Jane: "so I came out later and watched her move up to her usual place, and I have been watching since in the chapel ruins."

"May I inquire who knew of this watching of yours?" asked Mary Ursula, her tones full of resentment.

"Not any one, madam. Not any one in the world."

"Not Mr. Harry Castlemaine?"

"Oh no. I should not dare to speak of the subject to him, unless he first spoke of it to me. I have wished he would."

"As nothing more can be done here to-night, I think you had better return home," spoke Miss Castlemaine in the same proud, cold tones: though she mentally wondered which way of exit Jane would take.

"I was just going," spoke the trembling girl. "There—there is not—oh! forgive me, madam!—any one lying wounded on the beach, I hope?"

"I presume not," replied Miss Castlemaine. "The superintendent and his men are there."

Jane Hallet turned meekly, and disappeared amongst the pillars. Miss Castlemaine rightly conjectured there must be some stairs leading from these lower cloisters to the cloisters above that opened on the chapel ruins. By these Jane had no doubt descended, and would now ascend. In point of fact, it was so. George Hallet had eventually made a clean breast of

the whole secret to Jane, including the openings and passages. But the underground passage to the Grey Nunnery neither he nor any one else had known of.

Miss Castlemaine turned to it now. She was crossing towards it, her lantern held up to steer her between the pillars, when her foot stumbled against something. Bringing the light to bear, she stooped down and saw a man lying there on his back. He looked immensely tall, and wore a large cape, and a cap muffled over his forehead and eyes; and he lay as one dead. With another faintness of heart, Mary drew the cap upwards, for she thought she recognized the handsome features. Alas, yes! they were those of Harry Castlemaine: and they were set in what looked like the rigidness of death.

With a shrill cry—which escaped her unawares—Mary called him by name, and shook him gently. No, there was no response: he was surely dead! There could be little doubt that he must have been wounded during the fight, had run into the vaults, intending to make his escape by the chapel ruins, and had fallen down exhausted. Panting with fear and emotion, all considerations lost sight of in this great shock, Mary went back to the beach calling for aid, and supremely astonishing Mr. Superintendent Nettleby.

Mr. Harry Castlemaine! Mr. Harry Castlemaine lying there as one dead! Why, how did that come about? What had brought him there? unless, indeed, he had heard the row and the fighting? But then—how did he get down?

Mr. Nettleby spoke these problems aloud, as he proceeded with Miss Castlemaine to the spot, guided by her lantern, and followed by his two men. He assumed that the Grey Nunnery had been aroused by the noise, and the Lady Superior had come forth to see what it meant: and he politely apologized for having disturbed the Sisters. Mary allowed him to think this: and made no answer to his further expressed wonder as to how *she* had found her way down.

When they reached the spot where Harry Castlemaine lay, the first object the rays of the lantern flashed on was Jane Hallet. Aroused by Miss Castlemaine's cry, she had hastened back again, and was now kneeling beside him, her trembling hands chafing his lifeless ones, her face a distressing picture of agony.

"Move away," spoke Miss Castlemaine.

Jane rose instantly, and obeyed. Mr. Superintendent Nettleby, asking for the lantern to be held by one of his men, knelt down and proceeded to make what examination he could.

"I don't think he is dead, madam," he said to Mary Ursula, "but I do fear he is desperately wounded. How the dickens can it have come about?" he added, in lower tones meant only for himself, and rising from his knees. "Could one of the fools have fired off a shot in here, and caught him as he was coming on to us? Well, we must get him up to land somehow —and my boat's away!"

"He had better be brought to the Grey Nunnery: it is the nearest place," spoke Mary.

"True," said the officer. "But which on earth is the way to it out of here?"

"Up these stairs. I will show you," said Jane Hallet, stepping forward again. "Please let me go on with the lantern."

She caught it up: almost beside herself, as it seemed, with grief and distress; and the officer and men raised Harry Castlemaine. The stairs were soon reached: some winding steps cut in stone. Jane Hallet held the lantern to show the way; Miss Castlemaine, saying never a word of the secret passage, followed her; the men with their burden bringing up the rear. It was a difficult job to bring him up, for the staircase was very narrow. They came out by a concealed door at the end of the upper cloisters, and had to walk through them, to the chapel ruins. Mr. Nettleby never supposed but that the two women, as well as Harry Castlemaine, had come down the same way.

"To think that I should never have suspected any stairs were there! or that there was another set of cloisters under these!" he exclaimed in self-abasement, as he walked on through with the rest, avoiding the pillars. "Had I known it, and that there was a door opening to that strip of beach below, it would have been enough to tell me what might be going on. But how the deuce do they contrive to get rid of the goods after they are run?"

For Mr. Superintendent Nettleby was still ignorant of one thing—the secret passage to Commodore Teague's house. He

would not be likely to discover or suspect that until the official search took place that would be made on the morrow.

Once more the Nunnery was about to be disturbed to admit a wounded man at midnight: this second man, alas! wounded unto death. Tom Dance's son had gone forth to the world again, little the worse for his wounds; for the son and heir of the Master of Greylands, earth was closing.

The clanging of the night-bell aroused the inmates; and Sister Rachel, who was portress that week, went down accompanied by Sister Caroline. To describe their astonishment when they saw those waiting to enter, would be impossible. Harry Castlemaine, whom the motion and air had revived, borne by Mr. Nettleby and two of the coastguardsmen; the Superior, Mary Ursula; and the resuscitated Jane Hallet! Jane the erring, with the Nunnery lantern!

"Business called me abroad to-night: I did not disturb you," quietly observed Sister Mary Ursula to the round-eyed Sisters; and it was all the explanation she gave, then or later.

Harry was taken into the same room that had sheltered Walter Dance, and laid upon the same flat, wide sofa. One of the men ran off for Mr. Parker. The other went back with the superintendent to the scene of the struggle. The captured goods, as many of them as had been landed, had to be zealously guarded: Mr. Superintendent Nettleby had never gained such a feather in his official cap as this.

Harry Castlemaine lay where he had been placed, his once fresh face shorn of its fine colour, his eyes open to the movements around.

Such a patient was altogether different from young Dance the fisherman, and the Sisters had gone to awaken and amaze the Nunnery with the news. Only Mary Ursula was with him.

"Mr. Parker will soon be here, Harry," she said gently, bending over him.

A faint smile crossed his lips. "He can do nothing for me, Mary."

"Nay, you must not think that. You feel ill, faint; I know it; but——"

Some slight stir behind her had caught Mary's senses, and caused her to turn. There was Jane Hallet, standing half in

half out of the door, a mute, deprecatory appeal for permission to enter, unmistakably on her sad white face.

"Go back!" said Mary, with calm authority, advancing to the door with her most stately step, her hand raised against the intruder. "I told you to go home, Jane: it is the only thing you can do. You have no right to intrude yourself into the Nunnery. Go."

And she quietly closed the door, shutting Jane out, and returned to the bedside.

Harry's hand was feebly stretched out: it fell on her arm. "Let her come in, Mary: she is my wife."

"Your wife!"

"Yes; my wife. She has been my wife all along."

"I do not understand," faltered Mary Ursula, feeling she hardly knew how.

"We were married at the beginning of last winter. Fear of my father's displeasure has prevented my declaring it."

Mary was silent. Her heart throbbed unpleasantly.

"Jane is too good a girl for aught else," he resumed, the subject seeming to impart to him some fictitious strength. "She has borne all the shame and the blame in patience and silence for my sake. Did you suppose that the favourite pupil of the Grey Ladies, trained by themselves, could have turned out unworthily?"

"You should, at least, have confided this to Miss Hallet, Harry."

"No; to her least of all. Miss Hallet has her pride and her notions, and would have proclaimed it in the market-place."

"I do not seem to comprehend yet," replied Mary, many remembrances crowding upon her. In point of fact, she scarcely knew whether to believe him. "Last winter—yes, and since then, Harry—you appeared to be seeking Ethel Reene for your wife."

"I once had an idea of Ethel. I knew not that what I felt for her was nothing more than a brother's love: when I fell in love with Jane I learnt the truth. My teasing Ethel has been only jesting, Mary: pursued to divert attention from my real love, my wife."

Mary Ursula sighed. Harry had always been random and

blamable in some way or other. What a blow this would be for the Master of Greylands!

"You will let her come in, Mary! Are you doubting still?" he resumed, noting her perplexed countenance. "Let her come," he implored. "A short time and it will be too late."

Mary Ursula left the room. Jane was leaning against the wall outside, a picture of quiet ~~ex~~ulation. Too conscious of the estimation she was held in, she did not dare assert herself. The lantern, which no one had put out, stood in the passage: there was no other light. Mary drew her into the parlour—which was quite dark, excepting for the faint rays of the lantern which reached it. So much the better. Jealous for the honour of her family, Mary Ursula was feeling the moment bitterly, and her face would have betrayed it.

"Mr. Harry Castlemaine has been making a strange communication to me," she began. "He says he has married you."

"Oh, madam, it is true," returned Jane, hysterically, the sudden revulsion of feeling at finding it was known, the relief from her miserable concealment, finding vent in a flood of tears. "We were married last November."

"By whom?"

"Parson Marston," sobbed Jane. "He married us in his own church at Stilborough."

Surprise, resentment, condemnation of Parson Marston, overpowered Miss Castlemaine and kept her silent. Thinking of this inferior girl—very inferior as compared with the Castlemaines—as they had all been thinking lately, it was not in human nature that Mary should not feel it strongly. She possessed her share of the Castlemaine pride; though she had perhaps thought that it was laid down for ever when she left her home at Stilborough to enter the Grey Nunnery.

"It was very strange of Mr. Marston; very wrong."

Jane's sobs did not allow her to make any rejoinder. Of course it was wrong: no one felt more assured of that than Jane. She did not dare tell how Harry Castlemaine's will had carried all before him, including herself and the parson. Jane had perhaps been quite willing to be carried; and the parson yielded to "You must," and was besides culpably indifferent.

"He would only have taken the girl off to a distance to be tied up by a strange parson," was Mr. Marston's excuse later, when speaking of it. "I am not to blame; I didn't set the marriage afloat."

"How long should you have kept it secret?" asked Miss Castlemaine, looking at Jane in her distress.

"As long as my husband had wished me to keep it, madam," was the sobbing answer. "He was always hoping some occasion might arise for declaring it; but he did not like to vex Mr. Castlemaine. It was my aunt's not knowing that grieved me most."

"I almost wonder you did not tell Sister Mildred when you were here," observed Mary, musing on the past.

"Oh, if I had been able to tell her!" returned the girl, impulsively clasping her hands. "It was very hard to bear, madam, all that blame; but I tried to be patient. And many might have thought almost as ill of me for letting one so much above me make me his wife."

"Has no one at all known it?" asked Mary.

"Only old Mrs. Dance. She has known it from the first. We used to meet at her cottage."

"Well, Jane, what is done cannot be undone. You are his wife, it seems, and have not deserved the reproach of light conduct passed upon you. So far, I am, for your sake, glad. He has asked to see you. You can go in."

So Jane crept into the chamber, where her husband lay dying, and stood by his side, her heart breaking.

"Don't grieve, Jane, more than you can help," he said, clasping her hand. "This will answer one good end: you will be cleared."

She fell on her knees, weeping silent tears. "To save your life I would remain under the cloud for ever," she sighed. "Oh, is there no hope?—no hope?"

"Well, we shall see: the doctor will soon be here," said Harry, evasively. "There! dry your tears, Jane; take heart, my dear."

And the doctor came without much further delay, and examined his patient, and found that a bullet was lodged within him.

"There must be an operation," said he, smoothing his grave

face. And he hastened to despatch a messenger on a fleet horse for Surgeon Croft, the most clever operating surgeon in Stilborough.

But Mr. Parker knew quite well that there remained no hope in this world for Harry Castlemaine.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE NEXT MORNING.

Morning dawned. The Grey Nunnery was like a fair. More than once had Greylands been excited during the year now swiftly approaching its close, but never as now. A dreadful encounter between smugglers and the preventive men! and Harry Castlemaine shot down by one of their stray bullets! and Jane Hallet come to life again!

The Master of Greylands sat by the dying couch, giving vent now and again to his dire distress. There was no hope for his son; he knew it from the medical men: and his son had been the one only thing he had much cared for in life.

Of all the blows that had fallen on James Castlemaine, none had been like unto this. The shock alone was terrible. It reached him first through one of those Grey Sisters against whom he had been so prejudiced. Sister Ann had gone running over to knock up the Dolphin, lest cordials or other things, which the Nunnery lacked, might be required for the wounded man. After arousing John Bent and telling the news, she sped onwards under the night stars to apprise the Master of Greylands. Greylands' Rest lay still and quiet; its doors and windows closed, the blinds drawn. Sister Ann rang, and was immediately answered by the bark of a dog inside. "Cæsar, Cæsar!" she called out; and Cæsar, recognizing the voice of a friend, ceased his barking; which was impolitic on Sister Ann's part, for if he had kept on it would have aroused the inmates. Sister Ann waited and rang again; and then, terrified at the thought that the Master of Greylands might be too late to see his son, she retreated a few steps and shouted up at the windows. The Master heard it, and appeared.

"Who is it?" he asked, leaning from the window he had

thrown up, and recognizing with astonishment the dress of a Grey Sister.

"Oh, sir, it's bad news!" replied Sister Ann. "It's ill news about Mr. Harry, sir: and I've run all the way here, and am out of breath."

"What ill news about Mr. Harry?"

"He has been brought to the Nunnery dreadfully wounded. I've come up to ask you to make haste, sir, if you'd see him; for he may be bleeding to death."

"Wounded?—how?" gasped the Master, feeling as bewildered as a woman, and perhaps scarcely crediting what he heard.

"There has been a frightful fight to-night, they say, with smugglers, sir. Mr. Nettleby and two of the coastguardsmen brought him in. We don't know what to believe or think."

With a hasty word to the effect that he would be at the Nunnery directly, the Master of Greylands closed the window. Dressing, he went forth on his errand. Of the two ways to the Nunnery, Chapel Lane was somewhat the nearer one; and he took it. He bared his aching head to the night-air as he traversed it with fleet strides, wondering what extent of misery he might be entering upon. No very lengthened space of time had elapsed since he sat in his room dwelling on the misfortunes and the deaths that the year had brought forth. Was there to be yet further misfortune?—another death? A death to him more cruel than any that had gone before?

As he neared the turning to the Hutt, he dashed down the opening and tried the house-door. It was fast, and no response come: and the Master knocked at the little window that belonged to Teague's bed-chamber. "Not back yet," he murmured to himself, after waiting barely a moment, and dashed back again and on towards the Nunnery. And there he found his worst fears as to Harry realized, and learnt from Mr. Parker that there was no hope of saving him.

The bleeding had been then stopped by Mr. Parker, but Harry had fainted. Before he revived and was collected enough to speak, or perhaps strong enough, the other surgeons came, and not one word in private had been exchanged between father and son.

With the morning Harry was better. Better in that he lay

comparatively at ease and could converse at will. The surgeons had done for him what little could be done; but his life was only a question of hours. In distress, the like of which he had never before experienced, sat the Master of Greylands. His handsome, noble, attractive son, of whom he had been so proud, whom he had so loved in his heart, was passing from his sight for ever. His chair was drawn close to the couch, his hand lay on Harry's, his aching eyes rested on the pale face. The whole world combined could not have wrought for him a trial such as this: his own death would have been as nothing to it: and the blow unnerved him.

They were alone together: none intruded unnecessarily on these closing hours. Harry briefly gave the history of the past night, thanking Heaven aloud that his father was not present at it.

"The two first boats had not long been in, and not half their packages were landed, when another boat glided quietly up," said Harry. "I thought it was from the vessel with more goods, till I heard Nettleby's tones, and found the revenue men were leaping out of her. I ran to close the passage to Teague's, and was coming back again when I found myself struck here," touching his side. "The pain was horrible: I knew what it meant—that I was shot, and useless—and I slipped into the vaults, intending to get up to the chapel ruins, and so away. I must have fainted there, and fallen; for I remember nothing more until Nettleby and the rest were bringing me here."

"They found you lying there?"

"Not they. Mary Ursula."

"Mary Ursula!"

"It seems so. She was there with a lantern, I gather. Father, you will, doubtless, learn all you wish to know; I cannot explain it. You know what this shot has done for me?"

The Master did not answer.

"It is my death. I forced Croft to tell me. By to-night all will be over."

Mr. Castlemaine, striving and struggling to maintain composure, broke down, and sobbed aloud with an emotion never before betrayed by him to man. The distress to Harry was all too great: he had been truly attached to his indulgent father.

"For my sake, father!—for the little time I have to stay!"

he said imploringly. And the Master smothered his grief as far as he could.

With his hand held between his father's, and his sad eyes beseeching pardon for the offence which in rude life he had dreaded to tell, Harry Castlemaine made his confession: Jane Hallet was his wife. It was somewhat of a shock, no doubt, to the Master of Greylands, but it fell with comparative lightness on his ear: beside the one great trouble close at hand, others seemed as nothing. Jane might be his son's wife; but his son would not live to own her to the world.

"Do you forgive me, father? That it was wrong, I am aware; but only myself knows how dearly I grew to love her. The place has been heaping scorn upon her, but she bore it all for my sake, knowing she would be cleared when I could declare it to you."

"She has not deserved the scorn, then?"

"Never. I would not have hurt a hair of her head. Say you forgive me, father!—the moments are passing."

"Yes, yes, I forgive you; I forgive you. Oh, my boy, I forgive all. I wish I could die for you."

"And—will you set her right with the world?" continued Harry, holding his father's hand caressingly. "It is only you who can do it effectually, I think. And allow her a little income to maintain her in comfort?"

"Harry, I will do all."

"She is my wife, you see, father, and it is what should be. Your promise will ease my soul in dying. Had I lived, she would have shared my state and fortune."

"All, all; I will do all," said the Master of Greylands.

"For the past, it is not she who is to blame," continued Harry, anxious that there should be no misapprehension as to Jane's conduct. "She would have held out against the marriage on account of my family, always begging of me to wait. But I would have my way. Do not visit the blame upon her, father, for she does not deserve it."

"I understand: she shall have all justice done her, Harry. Be at peace."

But, in spite of this one absorbing grief for his son, there was another care that kept intruding itself in no minor degree on the Master of Greylands: and that was the business con-

nected with the smugglers. How much of that was known?—how much had good fortune kept concealed? While the doctors were again with Harry towards midday, Mr. Castlemaine snatched a moment to go out-of-doors.

How strange the broad glare of day appeared to him! Coming out of the darkened room, with its hushed atmosphere, its sadness, into the light of the sun, high in the heavens, the hum of the people, the stir of health and busy life, the Master of Greylands seemed to have passed into another world. The room he had left was as the grave, where his son would soon be; this moving scene as some passing pageantry.

Greylands was making the most of it. The strange accident to Harry Castlemaine; or the astounding news touching the smugglers, or the reappearance of Jane Hallet—it was hard to say which was the most exciting theme. All sorts of reports were afloat; some true, some untrue, as usual. Mr. Superintendent Nettleby, it appeared, had for a considerable time suspected that smuggling to an extraordinary extent was carried on somewhere along this line of coast. The difficulty was—how to hit upon the spot. Surmises were chiefly directed to the little place called Beeton, a mile or two higher up. The Superintendent suspected any spot rather than Greylands. Excepting the open beach, there was no spot at Greylands where a cargo could be run—and the superintendent took care that the beach should be protected. Not an idea existed that the little strip of beach under the old Friar's Keep could be made available for anything of the sort, or that it had a passage communicating with Commodore Teague's Hutt. The unsuspected Greylands had been left at ease, as usual, to do what it would.

Upon Greylands the news fell as a thunderbolt. The Friar's Keep been used as a place of smuggling for unnumbered years!—and Commodore Teague was head smuggler!—who stowed away the goods in his cellar until he could take them away in his spring cart! Greylands knew not how to believe this: and somewhat resented it, for the Commodore was an immense favourite. One fact seemed indisputable—the Commodore was not to be seen this morning, and his place was shut up.

The version generally believed was this. Mr. Superintendent

Nettleby, observing, after dark had fallen, a suspicious-looking vessel lying close in shore, and having had his attention directed to this same vessel once or twice before, had collected his men and taken up his place in the revenue-boat, under cover of the walls of the Grey Nunnery, and there waited until it was time to drop upon the smugglers: catching them in the act. Most of the men he surprised were sailors; but there was at least one other man (if not two men) who was muffled up for disguise; and without any disguise, working openly, was Commodore Teague. The Commodore and these other men had escaped to the ship, and neither the superintendent nor his subordinates knew who they were. The wounded sailor was a foreigner, who could speak only a few words of English. He gave his name as Jacob Blum, and appeared to know very little about the affair, declaring solemnly that he had joined the vessel in Holland only a month before, and was not apprised of her being in the contraband trade.

But Harry Castlemaine—what caused him to be so fatally mixed up with the fight? Lacking an authorized version, the following, spreading from one to another, was soon accepted as truth. Mr. Harry, promenading about late in the night with his sweetheart, Jane Hallet (and sly enough she must have been, to have stayed all this time at old Goody Dance's, and never shown herself!), had his ears saluted with the noise and shots going on below. He rushed into the Keep and down the staircase to the vaults beneath, where he was struck down by a stray shot, the fighters not even knowing that he was there. Jane Hallet must have followed him. Sister Mary Ursula's appearance on the scene, as mentioned by the two coastguardsmen, was accounted for in the same natural manner. She had heard the disturbance from her chamber-window—for of course the noise penetrated as far as the Grey Nunnery—and had gone forth, like a brave, good woman, to ascertain its meaning and see if succour was needed.

All these several reports were listened to by Mr. Castlemaine. He found that, as yet, not a shade of suspicion was directed to him or his house: he fervently hoped that it might never be. That would be one drop taken out of his cup of bitterness. Commodore Teague was regarded as the sole offender, so far as Greylands was concerned.

"To think that we should have been so deceived in any man!" exclaimed the landlord of the Dolphin, standing outside his door with his wife, and addressing Mr. Castlemaine and the crowd together. "I'd have believed anybody in the place dishonest, sir, rather than Teague."

"We have not yet had Teague's defence," spoke the Master of Greylands. "It is not right to condemn a man unheard."

"But the coastguardsmen saw him there at work, sir," retorted ready Mrs. Bent. "Henry Mann says he was hard at it with his shirt-sleeves rolled up. He wouldn't be helping for love: he must have had his own interest there."

The Master of Greylands was wisely silent. To defend Teague too much might have turned suspicion on himself: at least, he fancied so in his consciousness: and the probability was that the Commodore would never return to ascertain how he stood with Greylands.

In the course of the morning, making rather more commotion than usual, Tom Dance's fishing-boat came sailing in. Tom and his son were on board, and a fair haul of fish. The various items of news were shouted out by half-a-dozen tongues as soon as it was within hailing distance. Tom gave vent to sundry surprised ejaculations in return, as he found the cable and made the boat fast, and landed with a face of astonishment. The one item that seemed most to stagger him was the state of Mr. Harry Castlemaine.

"It can't be true!" he cried, standing still, while a change passed over his countenance. "Shot by smugglers!—Mr. Harry Castlemaine dying!"

Tom Dance turned in at his own door, changed his wet things for dry ones, and went up towards the throng round the Dolphin. Mr. Castlemaine was just crossing back to the Nunnery, and looked at him, some involuntary surprise in his eyes.

"Is it you, Dance?"

"It's me, sir: just in with the tide. I be struck stupid, hearing what they've been telling me, down there," added Tom, indicating the beach.

"Ay, no doubt," said the Master of Greylands, in subdued tones. But he walked on, saying no more.

Tom Dance's confrères in the fishing-trade had no idea that

he had not sailed out in the ordinary way with the night tide. The reader knows that at midnight he was at least otherwise occupied. Tom had done a somewhat daring act. He and his son, uninjured in the fray, had escaped in the ship's boats; and Tom, flinging off his disguising cape and cap, his sea-boots, and in fact most of his other attire, leaped into the water to swim to his fishing-boat, lying on the open beach. It was his one chance of escape. He felt sure that neither he nor Walter had been recognized by Nettleby and his men; but, if they were to go off to Holland in the vessel and so absent themselves from Greylands, it would at once be known that they were the two who had been seen taking part in the work. No man in Greylands was so good a swimmer as Dance; and he resolved to risk it. He succeeded. After somewhat of a battle—the water was frightfully cold too—he gained his boat. It had just floated with the in-coming tide. By means of one of the ropes, of which there were several hanging over the side, he climbed on board, put on some of his sea-toggery lying there, and slipped the cable. The moderate breeze was in his favour blowing off the land. He hoisted the staysail, and was soon nearing the ship, which was already spreading her canvas for flight. From the vessel Dance took his son on board. They stayed out all night, fishing: it was necessary, to give a colouring to things and avert suspicion; and they had now, close upon midday, come in with a tolerable haul. Walter had orders to remain on board, occupy himself there, and *be still*, whilst Tom landed to gather news and to see which way the wind blew.

But he had never thought to hear these sad tidings about Harry Castlemaine.

"It has a'most done me up," he said, returning on board again and speaking to his son. "He was the finest young fellow in the country, and the freest in heart and hand. And to be struck like this!"

"How much is known, father?" asked Walter, stopping in his employment of sorting the fish.

"Nothing's known, that I can hear," growled Tom Dance, for he was feeling things just then. "It's all laid on Teague's back—as Teague always good-naturedly said it would be, if a blow-up came."

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"Can Teague ever come back, father?"

"Teague don't want to. Teague has said oftentimes that he'd as soon, or sooner, be over among the Dutch than here. He was always ready for the start, I expect. He'll be writing for us to go over and see him next summer."

"I know he liked them foreign towns: he's often been in 'em," observed Walter. "And he must have feathered his nest pretty well."

"Yes; he won't need to look about him for his pipe and his dinner of a day. Our chief nest-egg is smashed though, lad. No more secret night-work for us ever again."

"Well, you must have feathered the nest too, father," returned Walter, privately glad that the said night-work was over, for he had never liked it in his heart.

"You just hold your tongue about feathering nests," sharply reprimanded Tom. "Once let folk fancy I've more than fishing would bring in, and they might set on to ask where it come from. *Your* nest won't be feathered by me, I can tell ye, young man, unless you keep a still tongue in your head."

"There's no fear of me, father."

"And there'd better not be," concluded Tom Dance. "I'd ship you off after Teague, short and quick, if I thought there was."

The afternoon was drawing to its close. On the rude couch, more exhausted than he had been in the morning, drawing every moment now nearer to death, lay Harry Castlemaine. His step-mother, Flora, Ethel, good old Sister Mildred, and Mary Ursula, all had taken their last farewell of him. Mrs. Bent had contrived to get in, and had taken hers with some bitter tears. Mr. Parker had just gone out again: the Sister in attendance, perceiving what was at hand, had soon followed him. The poor wife, Jane, only acknowledged to be left, had gone through her last interview with her husband and said her last adieu. Almost paralyzed with grief, suffering from undue excitement which had been so long repressed, she had relapsed into a state of alarming prostration, that seemed worse than faintness. Mr. Parker administered an opiate, and she was now lying on her old bed above, cared for by Sister Mildred. And the sole watcher by the dying bed was Mr. Castlemaine.

Oh, what sorrow was his! The only living being he had greatly cared for in the world dying before his aching eyes. It was for him he had lived, had schemed, had planned and hoped. That unlawful smuggling had been only carried on in reference to Harry's future wealth. But for Harry's position, that Mr. Castlemaine had so longed to establish on an elevated footing, he had thrown it up long before. It was all over now; the secret work, the hope, and the one cherished life.

"Father, don't!" panted Harry, as Mr. Castlemaine every now and then found his emotion growing beyond control. "It may be better for me to go. I used to look forward, I've often done it, to being a good son to you in your old age: but it may be best as it is."

Mr. Castlemaine could not trust himself to answer.

"And you'll forgive me for all the trouble I've cost you! As I trust God has forgiven me. I have been thinking of *Him* all day, father."

Mr. Castlemaine knew not how to keep down his emotion. Oh, how bitter it was to him, this closing hour, his heart aching with its pain!

"It won't be so very long, father; you'll be coming, you know: and it is a journey that we must all take. What's the matter?—it's growing dark!"

Mr. Castlemaine raised his eyes to the window. The light was certainly fading on the panes; the dusk was stealing over the winter afternoon. Harry could only speak at intervals, and the words came out with long pauses between them. Mr. Castlemaine fancied he was beginning lightly to wander: but a great many of us are apt to fancy that when watching the dying.

"And you'll take care of Jane, father? Just a little help, you know, to keep her from being thrown on the world. It's not much she'll want: I don't ask it."

The hand, lying in Mr. Castlemaine's, was pressed almost to pain; but there was no other answer. The aching heart was well-nigh unmanned.

"And don't be angry with Marston, father: he only did what I made him do. He is a better man than we have thought him. He was very good to me when he was here to-day, and left me comfort."

Mr. Castlemaine lodged his elbow on his knee, and bent his brow upon his hand. For some time there was silence. Harry, who had none of the restlessness sometimes characteristic of the final scene, lay quite still, his eyes closed.

A long, deep breath disturbed the silence. It startled Mr. Castlemaine. He looked up, and for a moment loosed the hand he held.

"Harry!"

Harry Castlemaine, his eyes wide open now, raised his head from the pillow. He seemed to be staring at the window with a fixed look, as though he could see beyond, and found something strange there.

"Father, dear father, it is she!" he suddenly cried out in his natural tones, a deep, exultant joy in them. "It is my mother. Oh, yes, mother, I am coming!"

The Master of Greylands was startled. Harry had never seen his mother to remember her; he knew her only by her portrait, which hung in one of the rooms, and was a speaking likeness of her. Harry had fallen back again, and lay with a smile upon his face. One more deep respiration came slowly forth: it was the last he had to take in this world.

The bereaved father saw what it was, and all his bitter sorrow rose up within him. He fell upon the unconscious body lying there; his trials seeming greater than he could bear.

"Oh, Harry, my son! my son! Would God I could have died for thee, my son, my son!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHAT BECAME OF ANTHONY.

Little explanation need be given regarding the practices so long carried on with impunity. Some ten or fifteen years before, Commodore Teague (commodore by courtesy) had taken the Hutt of old Mr. Castlemaine, on whose land it stood. Whether the Commodore had fixed on this abode with the intention of setting up in the contraband trade, so much favoured then and so profitable, or whether the facilities which

the situation presented, arising from the subterranean passage to the beach, which Teague himself discovered, and which had been unknown to the Castlemaines, first induced the thought, cannot be told. Certain it is, that Teague organized and embarked in it; and was joined by James Castlemaine. James Castlemaine was a young and active man then, ever about; and Teague probably thought that it would not do to run the risk of being *found out* by the Castlemaines. He made a merit of necessity; and by some means induced James Castlemaine to become his partner in the work. His proposal was a handsome one. James Castlemaine was to take half the profits; he himself would take the risk. Perhaps James Castlemaine required little urging: daring, careless, loving adventure, the prospect presented charms for him that nothing else could have brought. And the compact was made.

It was never disclosed to his father, old Anthony Castlemaine, or to Peter, the banker, or to any other of his kith and kin, his son Harry excepted. As Harry grew to manhood and settled down at Greylands' Rest, the same cause that induced the Commodore to confide in James Castlemaine induced the latter to confide in his son—namely, that Harry might, one of these fine nights, find it out for himself. Harry delighted in it just as much as his father, and took an active part in the fun a great deal oftener than his father had ever done. Harry rarely allowed a cargo to be run without him; Mr. Castlemaine, especially of late years, was only occasionally present. Few men plotting against his Majesty's revenues had ever enjoyed so complete an immunity from exposure. James Castlemaine and the Commodore had, to use young Dance's expression, pretty well feathered their nests: and Tom Dance—who had been taken into confidence from the first, for Teague needed the help of a strong man to stow away the cargoes after they were run—had not done amiss in his small way.

It was over now. The fever and the excitement, the peril and the golden harvest, all had come to an end, and Harry Castlemaine's life had ended with them. Striding over the field path that led to Greylands' Rest, went the Master of Greylands from his son's death-bed.

"Is it retribution?" he murmured, lifting his face in the gloom of the evening. "Harry's death following upon

Anthony's ere the year is out!" And he struck his forehead as he walked on.

"I beg your pardon, sir, for speaking at this moment. May I say how truly I feel for you? I would not have you think me indifferent to this great sorrow."

The speaker was George North. They had met in the most lonely part of the road, just before the turning into the avenue close to the house-gates. George North did not know that death had actually taken place; only that it was expected ere long. All his sympathies were with Mr. Castlemaine: he had been feeling deeply for him and for Harry during the day; and in the impulse of the moment, meeting thus unexpectedly, he stopped to express it.

"Thank you," said Mr. Castlemaine, quite humbly, drawing his hand across his face. "Yes, it is a bitter blow. The world's sunshine has gone out for me with it."

A rapid thought came to George North. What if, in this softened mood, he were to ask for a word of Anthony? If ever the Master of Greylands could be induced to afford information of his fate, it would be now: no other moment might ever occur so favourable as this. Yes, he *would* ask; be the result what it might.

"Forgive me, Mr. Castlemaine. There is a matter that I have long wished to mention to you; a question I would ask: the present, now that we are alone here, and both softened by sorrow—for believe me I sorrow for your son more than you may suspect—seems to me to be an appropriate moment. May I dare to ask it?"

"Ask anything," said the unconscious mourner.

"Can you tell me what became of young Anthony Castlemaine?"

Even in the midst of his anguish, the question gave the Master of Greylands a sharp sting. "What do you know about Anthony Castlemaine?" he rejoined.

"He was my—dear friend," spoke George in agitation. "If you would only tell me, sir, what became of him! Is he really dead?"

"Oh that he were not dead!" cried Mr. Castlemaine, unmanned by past remembrances, by present pain. "He would have been some one to care for; I could have learnt to love him as my nephew. I have no one left now."

"You have still a nephew, sir," returned George, deeply agitated, a conviction seating itself within him, that whatever might have been the fate of Anthony, the sorrowing man before him had not induced it. "A nephew who will ask nothing better than to serve you—if you will only suffer him to do so."

Mr. Castlemaine looked keenly at the speaker in the gloaming. Where is this nephew?" he inquired after a pause.

"I am he, sir. I am George Castlemaine."

"You?"

"Yes; I am poor Anthony's brother."

"And my brother Basil's son?"

"His younger son. They named me George North."

"George North Castlemaine," repeated Mr. Castlemaine, as if wishing to familiarize himself with the name. "And you have been staying here with a view of tracing out Anthony's fate?" he added, quickly arriving at the conclusion, and feeling by rapid instinct that this young man was in truth his nephew.

"Yes, sir. And I had begun to despair of doing it. Is he still living?"

"No, he is dead. He died that fatal February night that you have heard of. You have heard of the shot: that shot killed him."

In spite of his effort for composure, George allowed a groan to escape his lips. The Master of Greylands echoed it.

"It has been an unlucky year for the Castlemaines," he said in sad tones. "Death has claimed three of us; two of the deaths, at least, have been violent, and all of them have been that sudden death we pray against Sunday after Sunday in the Litany. My brother Peter; my nephew Anthony; and now my son!"

The suspicion, that had been looming in George's mind since the morning, rose to the surface: a suspicion of more curious things than one.

"I think I understand it," he said; "I see it all. In some such affray with the smugglers as occurred last night, Anthony met his death. A shot killed him; as it has now killed another? A smuggler's shot?"

"A smuggler's shot. But there was no affray."

"Tell me all, Uncle James," said the young man, beseech-

ingly. "Let me share the trouble of the past. It shall be hidden in my breast for ever."

"What do you suspect?"

"That the smuggling was yours: that that fact accounts for your having been in the Keep that night—for Harry's being there yesterday. Trust me as you have trusted your son, Uncle James: it shall be sacred. I will sympathize with you as he has done: am I not a Castlemaine?"

One rapid debate in his mind, and then the Master of Greylands pointed to his garden and led the way to the nearest bench there: the same bench on which George had whispered his love-vows to Ethel. He was about to disclose all to his newly-found nephew, to whom his esteem and admiration had before been given as George North; whom he already liked, nay loved, by one of those subtle instincts rarely to be accounted for. Unless he made a clean breast of all things, the fate of Anthony must in some particulars still remain dark.

He first of all satisfied George upon the one point which has already been declared to the reader: they, the Castlemaines, were the smugglers, in conjunction with the originator, Teague: explaining how he had been induced to join in the practices. And then he went on to other matters.

George Castlemaine sat by his side in the dusky night, and listened to the tale. To more than he had dared to ask, or hope for, or even to think of, that eventful evening. For Mr. Castlemaine entered upon the question of the estate: speaking abruptly.

"Greylands' Rest is Anthony's," said he.

"Anthony's!"

"Yes. Or rather yours, now Anthony is gone; but it was his when he came over. It is necessary to tell you this at once: one part of the story involves another. My father knew nothing of the smuggling; never had an idea of it; and the money that I gained by it I had to invest quietly from time to time through a London agent; so that he, and others, should not know I possessed it. A few weeks before my father died, he called me to him one morning to talk about the property——"

"Did he make a will, sir?"

"No. He never made one. Your grandfather was one of those men who shrink from making a will—there are many such men in the world. It was less necessary in his case than it is in some cases—at least he thought it so. Of his funded property, Basil had received his share, I had received mine, Peter had had his; all, years before. Nothing, excepting the estate, was left to will away. I see what you are wondering at, George—that out of twelve or thirteen hundred a-year—for that is what the estate brings in—your grandfather should have been able to live here so liberally and luxuriously: but during his lifetime he enjoyed almost as much more from a relative of my mother's, a source of income that went back at his death. Perhaps you know this. My father began that morning to talk to me. 'When do you expect Basil?' he asked abruptly: and the question astonished me, for we had never heard from Basil, and did not expect him. 'He will come,' said my father. 'Basil will know that I must be drawing near my end, and will come over to take possession here.' 'Leave Greylands' Rest to me, father,' I cried—for I had been hoping that it would be mine after him: I presume you see why?"

But George did not see: and said so.

"Because of what went on in the Friar's Keep," explained Mr. Castlemaine. "It would not do, unless I gave up that, to quit this place, or for a stranger to live at it. I knew Basil of old: he would just as soon have denounced it to the world as not. And, as I was not then inclined to give up anything so profitable, I wished to have Greylands' Rest. There is no other residence within miles of the place that would have suited me."

"And would my grandfather not leave it to you, sir?"

"He refused absolutely. He would not listen to me. Greylands' Rest must descend to Basil after him, he said, and to Basil's son—if Basil had a son. I begged him to let me purchase Greylands' Rest, and pay over the money to be invested for Basil. I said I was attached to the place, having lived in it all my life; whereas Basil had been away from it years and years. But the old man laughed, and asked where I was to find the money. Of course he did not know of my private resources, and I did not dare allude to them. I brought up Peter's name, saying he would assist me. Peter was rolling in

riches then. But it was all of no use: Basil was the eldest, my father said, and the estate should never pass over him to one of us. He drew up, himself, a sort of deed of gift, not a will, giving the estate to Basil, then, during his own lifetime; and he charged me, should Basil not have appeared at the time of his death, to remain in possession and keep it up for him. But he never charged me—mark you, George, he never charged me to seek Basil out. And, for that matter, we did not know where to look for him."

Mr. Castlemaine paused. This confession must be costing him some pain. But for the greater pain at his heart, the hopeless despair that seemed to have fallen on the future, it had never been made.

"My father died. I, according to his pleasure, remained on, as Master of Greylands' Rest. People took it for granted that it was left to me; I never gave a hint to the contrary, even to my brother Peter. Peter was falling into embarrassment then with his undertakings, and came to me for money. The time went on; each month as it passed and brought no sign of Basil, no tidings, seemed to confirm me in possession of the property. Before the first year came to an end, I considered it mine; as the second year advanced, it seemed so securely my own that I never gave a thought or a fear to its being taken from me. You may judge, then, what I felt when some young fellow presented himself one day at Greylands' Rest, without warning, saying Basil was dead, that he was Basil's son, and had come to claim the property."

Again the Master of Greylands paused. George did not interrupt him.

"When I recall the shame connected with that period, and would fain plead excuse for myself, I feel tempted to say that excuse lay in the suddenness of the blow. You must not think me covetous, George Castlemaine: love of money had nothing whatever to do with the assertion that Greylands' Rest was mine. I dreaded to be turned from it. I wanted, at any cost, to remain in it. At one of the interviews I had with your brother, I hinted that compensation might be made to him for his disappointment, *even to the value of the estate*, for I was rich and thought nothing of money. But Anthony was a true Castlemaine. I found: Basil's own son: for he at once replied

that he required only justice: if the estate was his, he must have it; if not his, he did not want to be recompensed for what he had no claim to. I was angry, mortified: he kept asking me for proof that it was really mine: I had no proof, for you see it never was mine."

"Perhaps you have destroyed the deed," said George.

"No; I have it still. It was always my intention to make restitution some time, and I kept the deed. My poor son would never have succeeded to Greylands' Rest."

"Who would then?" exclaimed George involuntarily.

"Anthony. I am speaking just now of my thoughts and intentions during that brief period of Anthony's sojourn at Greylands. But listen, George. You must have heard that on the last day of your brother's life we had an encounter in yonder field."

"Oh yes, I have heard of it."

"Something indoors had put me frightfully out of temper, and I was in an angry mood. But, as Heaven hears me, I resolved, later on in that afternoon, to make him restitution: to give up the estate to him. After leaving him, I went on; walking fast to try and throw off my anger. In passing the churchyard, I turned in and went up to my father's tomb. How it was I know not: I suppose Heaven sends such messages to all of us: but as I stood there reading the inscription, 'Anthony Castlemaine, of Greylands' Rest,' all the folly and iniquity of my conduct rose up vividly to confront me. I saw his fine old face before me again, I seemed to hear his voice, enjoining me to hold the estate in trust for Basil, or Basil's son, and relying with implicit trust on my honour. A revulsion of feeling came over me, my face flushed with a sense of shame. And I determined in that moment that before another day should close, Greylands' Rest should have passed to young Anthony. Heaven hears me say it, and knows that I should have carried out my resolution."

"I am sure of it," said George. It was impossible to doubt the fervent accent, the earnest tone, so full of pain.

"I am now approaching that fatal point, the death of Anthony. When I returned home, I sat down to consider the future. Two plans suggested themselves to me. The one was, to take Anthony into my confidence as to the business transacted

at the Friar's Keep; the other was to give the business up altogether, so far as I and Harry were concerned, and to make no disclosure of it to Anthony. I rather inclined to the latter course: I had realized a vast amount of money, and did not require more, and I thought it might be as well to get out of the risk whilst we were undiscovered. Teague, who had made money also, might give it up, or continue it on his score and at his own risk, as he pleased. I thought of this all that evening, and between ten and eleven o'clock, after the household had gone to bed, I went down to Teague's to speak to him about it. I had no particular motive, you understand, for going to Teague at that hour; the next morning would have been soon enough; but I had become impatient, restless, and so started off impulsively. I stayed talking with Teague until nearly half-past eleven: no decision was come to, as to our respective courses in regard to the trade; but that made no difference to my intended communication to Anthony as to the estate; and I meant to send for him to Greylands' Rest as soon as breakfast was over the following morning. Do you believe me?"

"I believe every word you say," replied George earnestly.

"I am telling it as before Heaven," was the solemn rejoinder. "As in the presence of my dead son."

And that was the first intimation George received that Harry was no more.

"It was, I say, about half-past eleven when I left the Hutt. In turning into Chapel Lane I saw a man standing there, holding on by one of the trees. It was Jack Tuff, one of our fishermen. He might have noticed me, though I hoped he had not; for you will understand that I did not care for the village to know of any night visits I might pay Teague. Upon reaching home I went up to my bureau, and sat for a few minutes, though I really can't say how many, looking over some private papers connected with the trade. Mrs. Castlemaine and the household had, I say, gone to rest. I began to feel tired; I had not been well for some days; and shut up the papers until morning. Chancing to look from the window before quitting the room, I saw a vessel at anchor, just in a line with the chapel ruins. It was a remarkably bright, moonlight night. The vessel looked like our vessel; the one engaged in the contraband trade; and I knew that if it was so,

she had come over unexpectedly, without notice, to Teague. Such an occurrence was very unusual, though it had happened once or twice before. I left the house again, passed down Chapel Lane, and went straight over to the chapel ruins to take a nearer look at the vessel. Bent's assertion that they stood and watched me is true; though I did not see them, and had no idea any one was there. One glance was sufficient to show me that it was in truth our vessel. I hastened through the Friar's Keep to the secret door, and down the staircase. The cargo was already being run: the boats were up on the beach, and the men were wading through the water with the goods. Teague was not there, nor was Dance or his son: in fact, the sailors had taken us by surprise. Without the delay of a moment, I ran up the subterranean passage to summon Teague, and met him at the other end: he had just seen the anchored vessel. Not many minutes was I away from the beach, George Castlemaine, but when I got back, the mischief had been done. Anthony was killed."

"Murdered?"

"You may call it murder, if you like. His own imprudence, poor fellow, induced it. It would appear—but we shall never know the exact truth—that he must have discovered the staircase pretty quickly, and followed me down. In my haste I had no doubt left the door open. At once he was in the midst of the scene. The boats hauled up there, the goods already landed, the sailors at their hasty work speaking in whispers, must have told him what it meant. In his honest but most fatal impulse, he dashed forward amongst the smugglers. 'Villains!' he shouted, or something to that effect. 'I see what work you are engaged in: cheating his Majesty's revenue.' Before the words had well left his lips, one of the men caught up a pistol, presented it at him, and shot him dead."

Mr. Castlemaine paused. His nephew was silent from agitation.

"The man who shot him was the mate of the vessel, a Dutchman by birth. When Teague and I reached the beach, we saw them all standing over Anthony."

"He was dead, you say?" cried George.

"Stone dead. The bullet had gone through his heart. I

cannot attempt to tell you what my sensations were; but I would freely have given all I possessed, in addition to Greylands' Rest, to recall the act. There was a short consultation as to what was to be done with him; and, during this, one of the men drew a diamond ring from poor Anthony's finger, on which the moonlight had flashed, and put it into my hand. I have it still, in my bureau."

George thought of this very ring—that Charlotte Guise had discovered and told him about. She had considered it the one conclusive proof against Mr. Castlemaine.

"I spoke of Christian burial for Anthony: but insuperable difficulties stood in the way. It might have led to the discovery of the trade that was carried on; and Van Steen, the man who killed him, insisted on his being thrown at once into the sea."

George groaned. "Was it done?"

"It was. Van Steen, a huge, angular fellow, with the strength of ten ordinary men, cleared out one of the boats. They lifted Anthony; he was rowed out to sea, and dropped into it. I can assure you, George, that for many a day I looked for the sea to cast the body ashore: but it has never done so."

"Where is that Van Steen?"

"Van Steen has died now in his turn. Strong giant though he was to look at, he died in Holland not long after of nothing but a neglected cold. I ought to have told you," added Mr Castlemaine, "that Teague went up almost at once to lock the gate of the chapel ruins: and there he saw John Bent pacing about: which made us all the more cautious below to be as silent as possible. It was our custom to lock that gate when cargoes were being run, both to guard against surprise and against any one coming into the ruins to look out seawards. We had three keys to the gate: Teague kept one; Harry another; Dance a third."

"And—you were not present!" remarked George, his bewildered thoughts recurring to the one fatal act of the night, and speaking as one in a dream.

"No. It was exactly as I have told you. My son was also away that night: he had gone to Newerton. Had he or I been there, I don't know that we could have hindered it: Van Steen

gave no warning of what he was about to do. Poor Anthony's own imprudence was in fault. He no doubt supposed that he had suddenly come upon a nest of lawless wretches; and never connected them in any way with the Castlemaines."

"Teague said that the shot heard by John Bent and others proceeded from his gun. That was not true?"

"It was not true. That he had been cleaning his gun that night, was so; for when I reached the Hutt, I found him occupied at it. It was also true that he was going out for a sail next day in his yacht——"

"And were you going with him as they said?"

"No, I was not. But if I am to tell you all, I must proceed in my own way. I went home that night, when the work was over, with Anthony's fate lying heavily upon me. After a sleepless night I was met in the early morning by the news that my brother Peter was dead; and I started for Stilborough. In the afternoon, when I returned, I found Greylands in commotion. Miles, my servant-man, told me of the disappearance of Anthony, and alluded indignantly to the rumours connecting me with it. I had to meet these rumours; prudence necessitated it; and I went to the Dolphin, where the people had mostly assembled, taking the Hutt on my way. The Hutt was shut up; Teague was not in yet. On my way I met him, just landed from his boat, and we stayed to exchange opinions. 'Don't let it be known that you were out at all last night, sir,' he said. 'Your man Miles sticks to it that you were not, and so must you.' I should have taken this advice but for one circumstance—in for one lie in for fifty, you know; and lies I was obliged to tell, to turn all scent from the illicit trade. I told Teague that in quitting the Hutt the previous night at half-past eleven, I had seen Tuff in the lane, and he might have recognized me. So my visit to Teague had to be acknowledged and accounted for; it was the safer plan; and in a word or two we settled what the plea should be—I had gone down to arrange about going for a sail with him the next morning in his yacht. This I spoke of at the Dolphin; but other facts and rumours suggested against me I ignored. It was a terrible time," passionately added Mr. Castlemaine. "I never recall it without extreme pain."

"It must have been so," said George in his sympathy.

"Teague went to the Dolphin later, but I had then left the inn. He said that when he heard the people commenting on the shot, instinct prompted him to take it on himself, and he there and then avowed that the report came from his own gun. The scream he altogether denied, insisting that it was all fancy. Would it had been!"

"Would it had been!" echoed George mournfully.

"It was like a fatality," cried the Master of Greylands, after a pause, "that I should have gone into the Keep that night by way of the chapel ruins. We always avoided that way of entrance and exit. Harry, I know, had used it more than he ought: it was so much more ready a way than going into Teague's and passing through the long passage: but I always cautioned him. The young are careless."

"The ghost of the Grey Monk?" asked George. "Who personated him? Of course I can understand that the farce was kept up to frighten the world from the Friar's Keep."

"Just so. The superstition already existed in the village, and we turned it to account. I recollect when I was a boy sundry old people testified to having been at odd times scared by the apparition at the windows of the Keep when they were passing at night. We resuscitated the ghost and caused him to show himself occasionally, procuring a monk's dress, and a lamp giving out a pale blue flame by means of spirit and salt. Teague and Harry were the actors; sometimes one, sometimes the other. It was an element of fun in my poor boy's life."

Mr. Castlemaine rose with the last words. He had need of repose.

"I will see you again in the morning, George. Come to me at what hour you please, and I will introduce you to my wife by your true name. Greylands' Rest is yours, you know, now."

"I—but I do not wish you to leave it, Uncle James," said George in his impulsive generosity.

"I shall be only too glad to get out of it as soon as possible," was the impressive answer. "Do you think I could bear to live in it now? Would to Heaven I had left it before this fatal year! George," he added, with agitation, "as I was walking home just now I asked myself whether the finger of God had not been at work. These illicit practices of mine

caused the death of Anthony; I denied that death, concealed it, have attempted to ridicule it to the world: and now my own and only son has died the same miserable death; shot down, perhaps, by the very self-same pistol. It is retribution, lad."

"I wish I could comfort you!" whispered George.

A moment's silence and Mr. Castlemaine recovered himself; his tone changed.

"The revenues of the estate have been put by since my father's death: left for such a moment as this: I told you I did not mean to keep possession always. They shall be paid over to you."

"They are not mine, Uncle James. Up to last February they were Anthony's."

"Anthony is dead."

"But he left a wife and child."

"A wife and child! Was it a boy? Perhaps I have spoken too fast."

"It is a girl," said George, not deeming it well to enter on the subject of Madame Guise before the morrow. Mr. Castlemaine had been tried enough for one day.

"Oh, a girl. Then you take Greylands' Rest. At least—I suppose so," added Mr. Castlemaine doubtfully. "My brother Basil made a will?"

"Oh yes. He made a fresh will as soon as he heard of his father's death. He bequeathed Greylands' Rest (assuming it to be his) to Anthony and to his sons, should he have any, in succession after him: failing sons, he left it to me after Anthony."

"That is all right, then. Until to-morrow morning, George."

With a pressure of the hand, the Master of Greylands went down the path to his house, and let himself in with his latch-key. The doors were closed, the blinds were down; for tidings of Harry's death had been already carried there. He went straight up to that solitary room, and shut himself in with his bitter trouble.

He was not a cruel man, or vindictive, or covetous. No, nor false, save in that one unhappy business relating to his nephew Anthony. All his efforts for many a year had been directed to warding off suspicion from the doings of the Friar's Keep: and when Anthony so unexpectedly appeared, his denying his claim

had not been for the sake of retaining the revenues, but because he would not, if he could help it, quit the house. To have had his fraudulent doings discovered and brought home to him would have been to the Master of Greylands worse than death. It was to keep them secret that he always discouraged the sojourn of strangers at Greylands; that he would not allow Harry to become intimate with any visitors who might be staying there: and of late he had shown an impatience, in spite of his liking for him, for the departure of George North. His dislike of the Grey Sisters had its sole origin in this. He always dreaded that their attention might be attracted some night to the boats, putting off from the contraband vessel; and he would have shut up the Grey Nunnery had it been in his power. That Mary Ursula should have joined the Sisterhood, tried him sorely; both from this secret reason and for her own sake. Almost as good, he thought, that she had been buried alive.

It was all over now, and the end had come. The last cargo had now been run, the paying trade, with its lawless excitement, had been stopped for ever. This would not have troubled him: he was growing tired of it, afraid of it: but it had left its consequences in its train; dealt, it may be said, a death-blow at parting. Harry Castlemaine had passed away, and with him the heart's life of the Master of Greylands.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CHANGES.

"It is the most ridiculously sentimental piece of business that I ever heard of in my life!" spoke Mrs. Castlemaine, in her harshest tones.

"Nevertheless, it is what *must be*," said her husband. "It is decided upon."

The morrow had come. George North—but we must put aside that name now—was at Greylands' Rest, and had held his further private conference with Mr. Castlemaine. The latter knew who Madame Guise was now, and all about it, and the motive of her residence in his house. He did not know of her having visited his bureau and seen the ring. He never would

know it. Some reticence was necessary on both sides, and each had somewhat to be ashamed of that the other never suspected.

George Castlemaine, lying awake that night at the Dolphin—his whole heart aching for his uncle, his saddest regrets, past and present, given to his brother and his cousin—had been, to use a familiar saying, turning matters over in his mind, to see how the best could be made of them. Greylands' Rest was his: there was no doubt about that; and he must and should take possession of it, and make it his abode for the future. But he hated to be the means of throwing discredit on his uncle: and this step would naturally do this. If Greylands' Rest was the younger brother George's now, it must have been the elder brother Anthony's before him: and all the deceit, suspected of the Master of Greylands earlier in the year, would be confirmed. Was there any way of preventing this? George thought there was. And he lay dwelling on this and other difficulties until morning, and found his way.

"The world need never know that it was Anthony's," he said, wringing his uncle's hand to give force to his argument. "Let it be supposed that the estate was only to lapse to him after Harry—that Harry came in first by my grandfather's will. None can dispute it. And you can make a merit, you know, of giving it up at once to me, not caring to remain here now Harry is gone."

A gleam of happier light dawned on Mr. Castlemaine's face. The prospect of tacitly confessing himself a traitor before his fellow-men had added much to his cup of bitterness.

"Nothing need ever be specially proclaimed," resumed George. "No one in the world has a right to inquire into our affairs. It can be *understood* that this is the case. Even to your own—your own family"—(the word on George's tongue had been "wife," but he changed it)—"you need not give any other explanation. Let this be so, Uncle James. It is for the honour of the Castlemaines."

"Yes, yes; it would take a load from me—if—if it can be done," said the Master of Greylands dreamily. "I see no reason why it should not be," he added, after consideration. "It lies, George, with you. You alone know the truth."

"Then that is settled. Be assured, Uncle James, that I shall never betray it."

And so, as George said, it was a settled thing. That version of the affair went abroad, and James Castlemaine's credit was saved.

His credit had also to be saved on another score: the death of Anthony. The fact that he was dead could no longer be kept from the curious neighbourhood: at least, it would have been in the highest degree inexpedient not to clear it up: but the Master of Greylands' knowledge of it might still be denied and concealed. The exact particulars in regard to his death, might be made known: Anthony had found his way down to the lower vaults of the Friar's Keep, that night; had pounced upon the smugglers, then running a cargo; they had shot him dead, and then thrown him into the sea. The smugglers were doing their work alone that night, Commodore Teague not being with them, and they were the sole authors of the calamity. Every word of this was correct, and George would so far enlighten the world and no more. If questioned as to how he came into possession of the facts, he would avow that the smugglers had confessed it to him, now that their visits to the coast were at an end for ever. He would say that the man who shot him had taken Anthony to be a coastguardsman: and this was fact also: for Van Steen said afterwards that in the surprise and confusion he had thought the preventive-men were on them. The Master of Greylands would hold his own as to his ignorance and innocence: and Mr. John Bent must go on working out the puzzle, of having fancied he saw him that night, to the end.

Neither need Madame Guise be altogether enlightened. George, a Castlemaine himself and jealous of the family's good name, would not, even to her, throw more discredit than need be on his father's brother. He would not tell her that Mr. Castlemaine had been one with the smugglers; but he would tell her that he knew of the practices and kept silence out of regard for Commodore Teague. He would disclose the full details of that night, as they occurred, but *not* that Mr. Castlemaine had been at all upon the beach, before Anthony or after him. He would say that when Anthony's fate was disclosed to him, and the ring handed over, the most lively regret and sorrow took possession of his uncle, but to proclaim that he had been made cognizant of it would have done no good whatever, and would have ruined

the Commodore. Well, so far, that was all true, and Charlotte Guise must make the best of it. Mr. Castlemaine intimated that he should settle a sum of money upon the little child, Marie; and the revenues of Greylands' Rest for the period intervening between his father's death and Anthony's death would, of course, be paid over to Charlotte.

It was in Mr. Castlemaine's room that this conference with George took place. Mr. Castlemaine unlocked the bureau, produced the ring, and placed it on George's finger. George took it off.

"I think his wife should have this, Uncle James. She may like to keep it."

"Who gave it to Anthony?" asked Mr. Castlemaine.

"My mother. It had belonged to her father, and to his father before him. She gave it to Anthony before she died, telling him it was an heirloom, and charging him to wear it in remembrance of her."

"Then I think it should now be worn by you, George; but settle it with Madame Guise as you will. Was your mother an Englishwoman?"

"Oh yes. Miss North. It was her brother, Mr. George North, who was my godfather, and left me all his little fortune. He was in the silk-mills, and died quite a young man and a bachelor."

"Ay," said Mr. Castlemaine, rather dreamily, his thoughts back with his brother Basil; "you have money, George, I know. Is it much?"

"It is about a thousand a-year. Some of it came to me from my father."

"And Ethel has about seven hundred a-year," remarked Mr. Castlemaine. "And there will be the revenues of Greylands' Rest: twelve hundred at least. You will be a rich man, George, and can keep up as much state as you please here."

It will be seen by this that George Castlemaine had asked his uncle for Ethel. Mr. Castlemaine was surprised: he had not entertained the remotest suspicion of any attachment between them: but he gave a hearty consent. He had liked George; he was fond of Ethel; and the match was an excellent one for her.

"I would just as soon not take her away with us when we

leave, except as a temporary arrangement," was his candid avowal. "Mrs. Castlemaine does not make her home too pleasant; she will be happier with you."

"Oh, I hope so!" was the fervent answer.

The conference, which had been a long one, broke up. George went away to his interview with Madame Guise, who as yet knew nothing; and the Master of Greylands summoned his wife to the room. He informed her briefly of the state of things generally: telling her who George North was, and of Anthony's death: using the version that George had suggested, and keeping himself, as to the past, on neutral ground. *She* was not to know even as much as Madame Guise, but to understand, with the world, that her husband only now learnt the truth. Now that poor Harry was gone, he said, George came next in succession to Greylands' Rest, and he (Mr. Castlemaine) had resolved to give it up to him at once. Mrs. Castlemaine, who did not feel at all inclined to quit Greylands' Rest, went into a state of rebellious indignation forthwith, and retorted with the remark already given.

"Why 'must' it be?" she asked.

"Nothing would induce me to remain in this house now Harry is gone," he answered. "I wish I was away from it already. The reminiscences connected with it are so painful that I can scarcely bear to stay in it for the short time that will be necessary. When a blight such as this falls upon a family, Sophia, it frequently brings changes in its train."

Mrs. Castlemaine, biting her lips, was not ready with a rejoinder. In face of this plea, her step-son's death, it would not be decent to say too much. Moreover, though her husband was an excellent man in regard to allowing her full sway in trifles, she knew by experience that when it came to momentous affairs, she might as well attempt to turn the sea as to interfere with his will.

"I like Greylands' Rest," she said. "I have lived in it since you brought me home. Flora was born here. It is very hard to have to leave it."

Mr. Castlemaine had his back to her, tearing up some papers in a drawer of his bureau. It looked exactly as though he were already preparing for the exit.

"And I expected that this would have been my home for

life," she added more angrily, his silence increasing her feeling of rebellion.

"No, you did not expect it," said he, turning round. "I heard my father inform you, the very day after you came here, that Greylands' Rest would descend to his eldest son; not to me."

"It *did* descend to you," was all she said.

"But it is mine no longer. Harry is gone, and I resign it to my eldest brother's only remaining son."

"It is *absurd* chivalry even to think of such a thing," she retorted, her throat swelling. "One would fancy you had taken leave of your senses, James."

"The less said about the matter the better," he answered, turning to his papers again. "At Greylands' Rest, now my son is gone, I cannot and will not stay: and George North—George Castlemaine—comes into possession of it."

"Do you resign the income of the estate as well as the house?" inquired Mrs. Castlemaine, as much mockery in her tone as she dared use.

"The arrangements I choose to make with him are my own, Sophia, and are private between himself and me. Whithersoever I may go, I shall take as good an income with me as you have enjoyed here."

"And where shall you go?"

"I think at first we will travel for a time. You have often expressed a wish for that. Afterwards we shall see. Perhaps you would like to settle in London, and for myself I care very little where it is."

A vision of the seductions of London—its shops, its shows, its theatres, its gay life—rose attractively, as in a vision, before Mrs. Castlemaine. She had never been to the metropolis in her life, and quite believed its streets were paved with gold.

"One thing I *am* surprised at, James," she resumed, quitting that bone of contention for another. "That you should give consent off-hand, as you tell me you have done, to Ethel's marriage with a stranger."

"A stranger! We have seen a good deal of him in the past few months; and he is my nephew."

"But a very disreputable sort of nephew. Really I must say it! He has concealed his name from us, and has aided and

abetted that governess in concealing hers! It is *not* respectable."

"But I have explained the cause to you. The poor woman came here to seek out her husband, and thought she should have a better chance of success if she dropped his name and appeared as a stranger. George came over in his turn, and at her request dropped his. Remember one thing, Sophia, the concealment has not injured us; and Madame Guise has at least been an excellent governess for Flora, and done her duty well."

"I should certainly think twice before I gave him Ethel. I don't see" (and here a little bit of the true animus peeped out) "why Ethel should have the pleasure of staying on at Greylands' Rest, whilst I and Flora are to be forced to leave it! If she must marry George North, I should at least make her wait a twelvemonth."

"They shall be married as soon as they please," said Mr. Castlemaine. "He will make her a good husband; I am sure of it: and his means are ample. Her home with him will be happier than you have allowed it to be with us: I did not forget that in my decision."

The lips of Mrs. Castlemaine were being bitten to pain. Whatever she said seemed to be twisted and turned against her. But she fully intended at some more auspicious moment, when her husband was in a less uncompromising mood, to have another trial at retaining Greylands' Rest. If she had only known the truth!—that it was George Castlemaine's by inheritance, and had been his since that past February night!

Meanwhile George himself was with Madame Guise, clearing up many things, and telling her of the manner of Anthony's death. Poor Charlotte Guise, demonstrative as most French women, sobbed as she listened and found that what she had feared was indeed a certainty. It was the shot of that fatal February night that had killed her husband: the scream heard had been his death-cry. She was in truth a widow and her child fatherless.

But, when the first shock passed away—and it was perhaps less keenly felt in consequence of what may be called these long months of preparation—her thoughts turned to Mr. Castlemaine. The certainty that he was innocent—for she implicitly believed her brother-in-law's version of the past—

brought her unspeakable relief. Prejudice apart, she had always liked Mr. Castlemaine: and she now felt ashamed for having doubted him. "If I had only taken the courage to declare myself to him at first, and my mission in England, I might have been spared all this dreadful suspicion and torment!" she cried, her tears dropping softly. "And it has been a torment, I assure you, George, to live in the same house with Mr. Castlemaine, believing him guilty. And oh! to think that I should have opened that bureau! Will he ever forgive me?"

"You must not tell him that," said George, gravely. "I speak in your interest alone, Charlotte. It would answer no good end to declare it; and, as it happened, no harm was done."

"No harm but to me," she moaned. "Since I saw that ring, my fears of Mr. Castlemaine and my own trouble have increased tenfold."

George held out the ring, saying that Mr. Castlemaine had just handed it to him. "He says," continued George, "that the one problem throughout it all which he could not solve, was why Anthony's friends never came over to seek him, or made inquiry by letter."

"Ah, yes," said Madame Guise, "there have been problems on all sides, no doubt—and looking back at them seems quite to bewilder me."

She had been slipping the sparkling ring on and off her slender finger that wore the wedding-ring. "Take it, George," she said, giving it back to him.

"Nay, it is yours, Charlotte: not mine."

"No," she answered in some surprise. "This is your family's ring, bequeathed to you by your mother. Anthony would have worn it always had he lived; you must wear it now. Let me put it on for you."

"It might be a consolation to you to keep it."

"I have other relics of Anthony's. There is his watch and chain; and there must be some little treasures in his desk. Mr. Bent will hand them over to me when he knows who I am. But as to this ring, George, I have no claim to it: nor would I keep it whilst you and Emma live."

"Were his watch and chain saved?" exclaimed George.

"Why yes. Did you never hear that? Mr. Bent keeps

them locked up with the other things. Anthony had been writing in his parlour that night at the Dolphin, you know; it was supposed that he took off his watch to see how the time went: at any rate, it was found on the table the next morning by the side of his desk."

George sighed deeply. All these trifles connected with his brother's last day on earth were intensely painful. Never, as he fully believed, should he look at the ring, now on his finger, without recalling Anthony to memory. Charlotte sat down and burst into renewed tears.

"Where is Ethel?" he asked.

"She was in the schoolroom just now, crying. Ah, George, she feels Mr. Harry's death very much; she liked him as a brother."

George proceeded to the schoolroom. As he was entering, Flora darted out, her eyes swollen. She, too, had loved her half-brother, for all her careless ways and his restraining hand. George would have detained her to speak a kind word, but she suddenly dipped her head and flew past, under his arm.

Ethel was not crying now. She stood by the fire, leaning her pretty head against the mantelpiece. Her face was turned from the door, and she was not aware that it was George who entered.

"My darling, I fear this is a sad trial to you," he said, advancing.

His voice startled her; his words caused the tears to flow again. George drew her to him.

"You don't know what it is," she cried. "I used to be at times cross and angry with him. And now I find there was no need for it, that he was already married. Oh, if I had only known!—he should never have heard an unkind word from me."

"Be assured of one thing, Ethel—that he appreciated your words at their proper value, and laughed at them in his heart. He knew you loved him as a brother: and I am sure he was truly attached to you."

"Yes, I know that. But—I wish I had been always kind to him," she added, as she drew away and stood as before.

"I come from a long talk with Mr. Castlemaine," said George, after a minute's pause, putting his elbow on the

opposite end of the mantelpiece to face her while he spoke. "I have been asking him for you, Ethel."

"Ye—s?" she faltered, her eyes glancing up for a moment, and then falling again. "Asking him to-day?"

"You are thinking that it is not the most appropriate day I could have chosen: and that's true. But, in one sense, I did not choose it. We had many future plans of different kinds to discuss, and this one had to come in with them. I have come to make a confession to you, Ethel. The name under which I have won you is not my true name. At least, not my whole name. I am a Castlemaine. Mr. Castlemaine's nephew, and that poor lost Anthony's brother."

Ethel looked bewildered. "A Castlemaine!" she repeated. "How can that be?"

"My dear, it is easy to understand. Mr. Basil Castlemaine, he who settled abroad, was the eldest brother of this house, you know, years ago. Anthony was Basil's elder son, I his younger. I came over to discover what I could of Anthony's fate, and I temporarily dropped the name of Castlemaine, lest being recognized as one of the family might hinder my search. My uncle condones it all; and I believe he thinks that I was justified in what I did. I have now resumed my name—George North Castlemaine."

Ethel drew a deep breath. She was trying to recover her astonishment.

"Would it pain you very much, Ethel, to know that you would make no change in your residence?—that you would spend your life at Greylands' Rest?"

"I—do not understand you," she faintly said, a vision of remaining under Mrs. Castlemaine's capricious control for ever, and of being separated from *him*, rushing over her like an ugly nightmare.

"Greylands' Rest is to be my home in future, Ethel. Mr. and Mrs. Castlemaine leave it——"

"Yours!" she interrupted in excitement. "Greylands' Rest?"

"Yes; my own. It is mine now. I come in after Harry," he added hurriedly, to cover the last sentence, which had slipped out inadvertently: "and my uncle resigns it to me at once."

"Oh dear," said Ethel, more and more bewildered. "But it would cost so much to live *here*."

"Not more than I can afford," he answered, with a smile. "I told you, Ethel, if you remember, that I expected to come into some property, though I was not sure of it. I have come into it. What would have been poor Anthony's, had he lived, is now mine."

"But—is Anthony really dead?"

"Yes. I will tell you about it later. The present question is, Ethel, whether you will share my home at Greylands' Rest."

He spoke with a smile, crossed over, and stood before her on the shabby old hearthrug. Just one moment of maidenly hesitation, of a sweet rising blush, and she bent forward to the arms that were opened to encircle her.

"One home together here," he fondly murmured. "One heaven hereafter."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CONCLUSION.

Once more the whole population of Greylands turned out in commotion. A sad and silent commotion, however, this time, as befitted the occasion. Voices were hushed, faces were sad, the church-bell was tolling. People had donned their best attire; the fishermen were in their church-going clothes, their boats, hauled up on the beach or lying at anchor, had rest to-day. Mr. Harry Castlemaine was about to be buried; and he had been a favourite with high and low.

They made their comments as they stood waiting for the funeral. The December day was raw and dull, the grey skies were threatening; but Mrs. Bent pronounced it not sufficiently cold for snow. She stood at her front-door, wearing a black gown, and black strings to her cap; and was condescendingly exchanging remarks with some of her inferior neighbours, and with Mrs. and Miss Pike, who had run over from the shop.

"We shall never again have such a week o' surprises as this have been," pronounced Mrs. Pike, a little red-faced woman, who

was this morning in what she called "the thick of a wash," and consequently had come out en déshabille, a shawl thrown over her cap. "First of all, them smugglers and poor Mr. Harry's wounds and death, and that good-hearted Commodore having to decamp, through them ferreting coastguards. And now to hear that the gentleman staying here so long is one o' the Castlemaines theirselves, and heir to Greylands' Rest after Mr. Harry! It beats the news column in the Stilborough paper holla."

"'Twas a sad thing, though, about that young Mr. Anthony," exclaimed old Ben Little. "The smugglers shot him dead, you see, and that scream Mr. Bent said he heard was his. Full o' life one moment, shot down the next! Them wretches ought to have swung for it."

"It's all a pack o' surprises, but the greatest be Jane Hallet," quoth Nancy Gleeson. "When it come out that Mr. Harry had married her, you might ha' knocked me down with a feather —just as Mr. Harry sent our Tim down one day, when he said a word again' her."

"It was very sly of Jane," struck in Miss Susan Pike, tossing her curls. "Never saying a word to a body, and making believe as it was just talk about her and Mr. Harry, and nothing else. I'd like to know how she wheedled him over."

"It's not for you to speak against her, Susan Pike," cried Mrs. Bent, in her sharpest tones. "*You* didn't wheedle him, and wasn't likely to. She is Mr. Harry's wife—widow, worse luck!—and by all accounts no blame's due to her. Mr. Castlemaine gives none: and we heard yesterday he was going to settle two hundred a-year on her for life."

"My! won't she set up for a lady!" enviously returned Miss Pike, ignoring the reprimand.

"Don't you be jealous, and show it, Susan Pike," retorted Mrs. Bent. "Everybody liked Jane: and we are all glad—but you—that she's cleared of the scandal. I did think it odd that *she* should go wrong."

"Her aunt have got her home now, and have took up all her proud airs again," said Mrs. Pike, not pleased that her daughter should be put down. "That Miss Hallet have always thought none of us was good enough for her."

"Hist!" said Ben Little, in a hushed voice. "Here it comes."

On the evening of the day following the death, the remains of Harry Castlemaine had been conveyed to his home. It was from Greylands' Rest, therefore, that the funeral procession was now advancing. The curious spectators stretched their necks to watch its progress; but as it neared them they retreated towards the hedges, into as small a space as possible; the men, with one accord, taking off their hats.

It was a very simple funeral. The state rather loved by the Castlemaines, and hitherto maintained by the Master of Greylands, it had not pleased him to extend to the obsequies of his son. Two mutes with their plumed batons were in advance; Parson Marston followed in his surplice and black hood, walking at the head of the coffin, which was covered by a pall and conveyed by carriers. Close to the coffin came Mr. Castlemaine; his nephew, George, accompanying him. Squire Dobie, long recovered from his illness, and Mr. Knivett, walked next; two gentlemen from Stilborough, and the doctors, Parker and Croft, brought up the rear. These comprised all the ostensible mourners. But behind them were many followers: John Bent, Superintendent Nettleby, and others, who had fallen in as the procession left the house; and Miles and the other men-servants closed it.

Whether any suspicion ever penetrated to Mr. Superintendent Nettleby, that it was not mere accident which had taken Harry to the secret vaults of the Keep that night, cannot be known. He never gave utterance to it, then or later.

The people came from the hedges after it had passed, and followed it slowly to the churchyard. Mr. Marston had turned and was waiting at the gate to receive the coffin, reading his solemn words. And for once in his life Parson Marston was solemn too.

"I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

A sound of pain, telling what this calamity was to him, came from the lips of the Master of Greylands. Few men could

control themselves better than he: and he struggled for calmness. If he gave way at the commencement of the service, how should he hold out to the end? So his face resumed its pale, impassive look, as he followed on through the churchyard.

It was not the custom at that time for women to attend the funerals of those in the better ranks of life. Women followed the poor, but never the rich. Neither did any, excepting those bidden to a funeral, attempt to enter the church as spectators: or at least, it was done only in very rare cases. The crowd who had gathered near the Dolphin, to watch it pass, took up their standing in the churchyard. From time to time the voice of Mr. Marston was heard, and that of the clerk in response; and soon the procession was out again.

The grave—or rather the vault—of old Anthony Castlemaine, had been opened in the churchyard, and Harry was laid in it. His own mother was there: the coffins lay side by side. The Master of Greylands saw his wife's as he looked in. The inscription was as plain as though she had been buried yesterday: "Maria Castlemaine. Aged twenty-six." There was a hushed sob as Harry's was lowered on to it, and for a minute or two he broke down.

It was all soon over, and they filed out of the churchyard on their way back to Greylands' Rest. Leaving the curious and sympathizing crowd to watch the sextons, and lament one to another that the fine, open-hearted young man had been taken away so summarily, and to elbow one another as they pushed round to see the last of his coffin, and to read its name:

"Henry Castlemaine. Aged twenty-six."

So he had died at the same age as his mother!

Miss Castlemaine sat in the parlour at the Grey Nunnery, little Marie on her knee. Since she knew who this child was —a Mary Ursula, like herself, and a Castlemaine—a new interest had arisen for her in her heart. She was holding the child to her, looking into her face, and tracing the resemblance to the family. A great resemblance there undoubtedly was: the features were the clearly-cut Castlemaine features, the eyes were the same dark lustrous eyes; and Mary wondered that the resemblance had never previously struck her.

Once more Mary had put aside the simple dress of the

Sisterhood for robes of mourning: flowing robes of silk and crape, worn for poor Harry. The cap was on her head still, shading her soft brown hair.

It was the week after the funeral. On the following day Madame Guise (as well retain the name to the last) was about to return to her own land with her child, escorted by George Castlemaine. It was not to be a separation for good, for Charlotte had faithfully promised to come over at least once in three years to stay with George and Ethel at Greylands' Rest, to give her child the privilege of keeping up relations with the Castlemaine family. A slab was to be placed in the church to the memory of Anthony, and *that*, Madame Guise said, would of itself bring her. She must afford herself the mournful satisfaction of reading it from time to time. After her departure Mary Ursula was to go to Greylands' Rest on a short farewell visit to her uncle. It would be Christmastide, and she would spend Christmas there. Mr. and Mrs. Castlemaine were losing no time in their departure from Greylands' Rest; they would be gone, with Ethel and Flora, before the new year came in. Mr. Castlemaine would not stay in it to see the dawning of another year: the last one, he said, had been too fated. George would return as soon as he could to take up his abode there—but travelling on the Continent was somewhat uncertain at that season. During the winter Mr. and Mrs. Castlemaine would remain in London; and in the spring George was to go up for his marriage, and bring Ethel home.

"A gentleman to see you, madam."

Little Sister Phœby had opened the parlour-door with the announcement, and was showing the visitor in. Mary thought it must be Mr. Knivett, and wondered that she had not heard the gate-bell. The fact was, Sister Phœby had had the front-door open, to let out the school children.

It was not Mr. Knivett who entered, but a much younger man: one whom, of all the world, Mary would have least expected—Sir William Blake-Gordon. He came forward, holding out his hand with trepidation, his utterly colourless face betraying his inward emotion. Mary rose, putting down the child, and mechanically suffered her hand to meet his. Sister Phœby beckoned out the little girl, and shut the door.

"Will you forgive my intrusion?" he asked, putting his hat

on the table and taking a chair near her. "I feared to write for permission to call, lest you should deny it to me."

"I should not have denied it; my friends are welcome here," replied Mary, feeling just as agitated as he, but successfully repressing its signs. "You have, no doubt, some good reason for seeking me."

She spoke with one of her sweetest smiles: the smile that she was wont to give to her best friends. How well he remembered it!

"You have heard—at least I fancy you must have heard—some news of me," resumed Sir William, speaking with considerable embarrassment and hesitation. "It has been made very public."

Mary coloured now. About a fortnight before, Mr. Knivett had told her that the projected marriage between Sir William and Miss Mountsorrel was at an end. The lovers had quarrelled and parted. Sir William sat looking at Mary, either waiting for her answer, or because he hesitated to go on.

"I heard that something had occurred to interrupt your plans," said Mary. "It is only a temporary interruption, I trust."

"It is a lasting one," he said; "and I do not wish it to be otherwise. Oh!" he added, rising in agitation, "you know, you must know, how hateful it was to me! I entered into it to please my father; I never had any love for her. The very word is desecrated in connection with what I felt for Miss Mountsorrel. I really and truly had not even friendship for her. When we parted, I felt as a man who has been relieved from some heavy despair; it was as though I had shaken off a felon's chains."

"What caused it?" questioned Mary, feeling that she must say something.

"Coolness caused it. For the very life of me I was unable to behave to her as I ought—as I suppose she had a right to expect me to behave. Since my father's death I had been more distant than ever, for I could not help remembering the fact that, had I held out against his will until then, I should have been free: and I bitterly resented it in my heart. Resented it on her, I fear. She reproached me with my

coolness one day—some two or three weeks ago, now. One word led to another; we had a quarrel and she threw me up."

"I am sorry to hear it," said Mary.

"Can you say that from your heart?"

He put the question so pointedly, and there was so wistful an expression of reproach in his face that she felt confused. Sir William came up, and took her hands.

"You know what I have come for," he cried, his voice low with agitation. "I should have come a week ago but that it was the period of your deepest mourning. Oh, Mary! let it be with us as it once was! There can be no happiness for me in this world apart from you. Since the day of my father's death I have never ceased to—I had almost said to *curse* the separation that he forced upon us; or, rather to curse my weakness in yielding to it. Oh, forgive me!—my early and only love, forgive me! Come to me, Mary, and be my dear wife!"

Her tears were flowing fast. Utterly unnerved, feeling how the old love was holding sway in her heart, she let her hands lie in his.

"I am not rich, as you know, Mary; but we shall have sufficient; and we neither of us care for riches. Our tastes are simple. Do you remember how we both used to laugh at parade and show?"

"Hush, William! Don't tempt me."

"Not tempt you! My dear one, you must be mine. It was a sin to separate us: it would be a greater sin to prolong the separation now that all impediments are removed."

"I cannot turn back," she said. "I have cast in my lot here, and must abide by it. I—I—seem to see—to see more surely and clearly day by day as the days go on"—she could scarcely speak for agitation—"that God Himself has led me to this life; that He is showing me hour by hour how to be more useful in it. I may not quit it now."

"Do you recall the fact, Mary, that your father *gave* you to me? It was his will that we should be man and wife. You cannot refuse to hear my prayer."

None knew, or ever would know, what that moment was to Mary Ursula: how strong was the temptation that assailed her; how cruelly painful to resist it. But, while seductive love showed her the future, as his wife, in glowing colours,

reason forbade her yielding to it. Argument after argument against it crowded into her mind. She had cast in her lot with these good ladies; she had made the poor patient community, struggling with need and privation, happy with her means. How could she withdraw those means from them? She had, in her own heart, and doing it secretly as to Christ, taken up her cross and her work in this life that she had entered upon. When she embraced it, she embraced it for ever: to turn from it now would be like a mockery of Heaven. Involuntarily there arose in her mind a verse of Holy Writ, strangely applicable. She thought it might almost have been written for her; and a silent prayer went up from her heart that she might be helped and strengthened.

"You know, Mary, that Mr. Peter Castlemaine——"

"Just a moment, William," she interrupted, lifting her hand pleadingly. "Let me think it out."

There were worldly reasons also why she should not yield, she went on to consider: ay, and perhaps social ones. What would the public say if, during this temporary estrangement from Agatha Mountsorrel, this foolish quarrel, she were to take him again with indecent haste, and make him her own? What would her own sense of right say to it?—her maidenly propriety?—her spirit of honour? No, it could not be: the world might cry shame on her, and she should cry it on herself. Sir William Blake-Gordon interrupted her with his impassioned words. This moment, as it should be decided, seemed to be to him as one of life or death.

"William, hush!" she said, gazing at him through her tears, and clasping his hands, in which hers still rested. "It may not be."

"Sit down, my love, and be calm. I am sure you are hardly conscious of what you say. Oh, reflect! It is our whole life's happiness that is at stake: yours and mine."

They sat down side by side; and when her emotion had subsided she told him why it might not, giving all her reasons, and speaking quietly and firmly. He pleaded as though he were pleading for life itself, as well as its happiness: but he pleaded in vain. The whole time she was repeating to herself that warning verse, as if she dreaded to lose sight of it for a moment.

"We will be as brother and sister, William, esteeming each other unto our lives' end, and meeting occasionally. You will still marry Agatha——"

"Mary!"

"Yes, I think it will be so; and I hope and trust you will be happy together. I am sure you will be."

"Our time together is short enough to-day, Mary. Do not waste it in idle words. If you knew how they grate on me!"

"Well, I will leave that. But you must not waste your life in impossible thoughts of me and of what might have been. It would put an end to our intercourse as friends. Thank you for what you have come this day to say: it will make my heart happier when its tumult and agitation shall be over."

Once more, by every argument in his power, by the deep love and despair at his heart, he renewed his pleading. But it did not answer. The interview was prolonged to quite an unusual period, and was painful on both sides, but it terminated at length; and when William Blake-Gordon left her presence he left it as her lover for ever.

Winter had passed: summer had come round again. Greylands basked in the light and heat of the June sun; the sea lay sleeping; and the fishing-boats were at rest.

There is little to record. Greylands' Rest held its new inmates: George Castlemaine and his wife. Ethel told her secrets to her husband now instead of to the sea: but they were both fond of sitting on the high cliffs together and watching its waves. Mr. and Mrs. Castlemaine were somewhere abroad, intending to stay there until autumn: and Miss Flora was where poor Harry always said she ought to be—at a good school. Mr. Castlemaine had carried his point, in spite of his wife's opposition. It must be one of two things, he said: either that Mrs. Castlemaine remained in England herself, or else that she in some way disposed of Flora; for Flora he was determined not to have abroad with him. So, being bent upon the foreign travel, Mrs. Castlemaine had to yield.

Jane Hallet—old names cling to us—had taken up her abode again with her aunt, in the pretty home on the cliff. It would probably be her home for life. Unless, indeed, she carried out the project she had been once heard to mention—that, when-

ever her aunt should be called away, she hoped to join the community of the Grey Sisters. Very sad and gentle and subdued did Jane look in her widow's cap. There was a little stone now in the churchyard to the memory of "Jane, infant child of Harry Castlemaine:" it had been placed there, unasked, by the Master of Greylands; and just as Jane used to steal down the cliff in the dusk of evening to meet her husband, so did she now often steal down at the same silent hour to weep over the graves of her child and its father, lying side by side. The income settled on Jane was sufficient for every comfort: she and her aunt now lived as quiet gentlepeople, keeping a servant. Jane had dropped her intimacy with Miss Susan Pike, though she would stay and speak cordially to her when they chanced to meet. The implied distance, or reserve, or whatever it might be, was not at all agreeable to that damsel, and she consoled herself by telling Greylands that Jane was "stuck-up." Little cared poor Jane. Her young life had always been a sad one: and now, before she was twenty years of age, its happiness had been blighted. George Castlemaine and his wife, at Greylands' Rest, were becoming fond of Jane: Ethel had always liked her. Jane visited them now sometimes; and Greylands was shown that they respected and regarded her.

"It is as it should be: Jane's manners and ways were always high—as Miss Hallet's are too, for that matter," remarked Mrs. Bent to her husband, one day, as they sat sunning themselves on the bench outside the inn, and saw Jane pass with Ethel. John only nodded in reply. With the clearing up of the fate of Anthony Castlemaine, and delivering over his effects to his widow, John's mind was at rest, and he had returned to his old apathy. By dint of much battling with himself, John had come to the conclusion that the tall man he saw crossing from the Chapel Lane to the ruins, that February night, might have been one of the smugglers on his way from the Hutt, who bore an extraordinary resemblance to the Master of Greylands. Jack Tuff held to it still that it was he; but Jack Tuff was told that his eyesight that night could not be trusted.

News came from Commodore Teague pretty often. He appeared to be flourishing in his new abode over the water, and had set up a pleasure-boat on the Scheldt. He sent pressing messages for Greylands to visit him; and Tom Dance and his

son intended to avail themselves of the invitation. The Commodore inquired after old friends, even to the ghost of the Grey Monk, whether it "walked" as much as it used to walk, or whether it didn't. The Hutt remained without a tenant. Not a soul would take it. Events had severely shaken the bravery of Greylands; the ghost had shown itself much in the last year, and the Hutt was too near the Friar's Keep, to render it a comfortable residence. So it remained untenanted, and was likely to remain so. Greylands would almost as soon have parted with its faith in the Bible as in the Grey Monk.

And the participation of the Master of Greylands in those illicit practices was never disclosed nor suspected, and the name and reputation of the Castlemaines remained untarnished. He was considered to have behaved in a remarkably handsome manner to his nephew George, in giving up Greylands' Rest to him during his own lifetime: George himself spoke feelingly of it: and what with that, and the sympathy felt for the loss of his son, and regret for the suspicions cast on him in regard to Anthony, Mr. Castlemaine stood higher in men's estimation than he had stood originally. And that was saying a great deal.

And Mary Ursula? Some further good fortune had come to her in the form of money. A heavy debt due to her father long years ago, which had been looked upon as a total loss, was suddenly repaid. It amounted, with the interest, to many thousands of pounds. As Mr. Peter Castlemaine had himself not a creditor in the world, all his obligations having been paid in full, it lapsed of course to his daughter. So, even on the score of fortune, she might not have been so unequal a match for Sir William Blake-Gordon. Sir William, knowing how utterly at an end was all hope of Mary, had, after some delay, renewed his engagement to Miss Mountsorrel: and this month, June, they had been married. Mary sent them a letter of fervent good wishes, and a costly present: and she told them that she and they should always be the best of friends.

She was too rich now, she was wont to say, laughingly, to the Sisters: and she introduced some comfortable changes into the Nunnery. One of the rooms hitherto shut up, a spacious apartment with the lovely sea view, she had caused to be restored and furnished for the Ladies, leaving the parlour still for the

reception-room. A smaller apartment with the same sea aspect was fitted up for herself, and her own fine piano placed in it. Here she spent much of her time. Sister Mildred had neither the means nor had she been educated with the tastes of Mary Ursula. The door leading from the Nunnery into the secret passage was bricked-up for ever.

A stately Lady-Superior made Miss Castlemaine; and the Grey Ladies, under her wise and gracious sway, enlarged their sphere of benevolence. Using her means, they sought out their fellow-pilgrims, entangled amidst the thorns of this world, and helped them on the road to a better. For herself, though anxiously fulfilling all the social obligations of her sphere here, she kept her feet and her heart set ever towards the eternal shore. And if—for she was but human—a regret ever came over her for the position she had persisted in resigning, or a vision rose of the bliss that would have been hers as William Blake-Gordon's wife, that one verse of the loving MASTER'S, delivered to His people during His sojourn on earth, was sure to suggest itself for her consolation. As it had come into her mind, uncalled for and unbidden, during that hour of her temptation, so would it return to cheer and comfort her now:

"*No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*"

THE END.

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